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Karnataka Decentralises Politics, Planning and Development

Harji Malik

January 2nd 1987 could be a watershed in India's political development as on this day 12.5 million voters above the age of 18 went to the polls in Karnataka's villages to elect 854 members of 19 Zilla Parishads in the Ramakrishana Hedge innovative version of Panchayati Raj. The ruling Janata Party has won control of 17 out of the 19 Zilla Parishads although it won a majority of seats in only eleven districts. But it can control the seven others by virtue of the Assembly seats there. The Congress (I) secured a majority in only three districts, Kodagu and Uttara Kannada, and although it won the expected majority in Chikmagalur, it has no Assembly members from the district. The Janata won 449 seats to the Congress (I)'s total of 393.

On January 20th the rural electorate will go to the polls again, this time vote in 55,030 members in a massive electoral exercise to form the 2,523 Mandal Panchayats which constitute the second tier in this three tier panchayat system introduced in the state after months of preparation. The third tier, the Taluk Panchayat Samithi, is a repre-

sentative body of Zila Parishad members, Mandal Panchayat pradhans, Members of Parliament and the State Legislature whose constituencies are included in the Taluk, and some other functionaries such as the President of the Primary Land Development Bank. Five members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and women will be coopted. After five years the Mandal Panchayats will nominate Naya Panchayats with limited civil and criminal jurisdiction.

In the past panchayati raj has turned out to be a travesty of people's power because panchayats enjoyed no real power in the development process. But the Hedge version is excitingly different. At least 40 percent of the Karnataka Government's consolidated fund will be transferred to the Zilla Parishads every year—the amount at present works out to nearly 900 crores—making the villager an actual and effective partner, through elected representatives, in development. Instead of ministers and bureaucrats in the State secretariat deciding on which district should get what funds, for which project, the vil-

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P.N. Lekhi: Was he the most unpopular Indian of 1986? The man who dared to defend Satwant.
(See Photo Feature on the Punjab Crises on pages 6 and 7.)

Academic Exposes Bihar Government's Fraud on the Constitution

By A Special Correspondent

Sitting in the functional surroundings of the Indian Institute of Public Administration hostel a silver haired academician speaks unassumingly of his phenomenal achievement. Dr. DC Wadhwa has recently won a historic ruling from the Supreme Court against legislative malpractice in the State of Bihar.

"I am a student of economics and not the Constitution, but it did not need a great legal mind to realise that the executive in Bihar was using re-promulgation of Ordinances to keep alive laws unconstitutionally. The total lack of awareness among both the people and the judiciary made me to take up this litigation," says Wadhwa of his three-year crusade.

He speaks with disbelief still at the basic apathy towards the constitutional rights allowed to the people of India. "We must question how in a democracy the President is himself approving re-promulgation without evaluating its constitutionality. But first we must be aware of our power and believe that we can effect change," he adds with an intensity which rallies as the motivating force behind the man and his achievement.

It all started with Dr. Wadhwa's research on agrarian structures in Bihar for his five-volume work on agrarian legislation in India.

While studying the legislation on transferability of Raiyati holdings in Bihar he came across the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act which unearthed the curious phenomenon of re-promulgation of Ordinances.

Ordinances are temporary

laws with a maximum life of 7½ months unless replaced by an Act or disapproved by a resolution of the legislature before that.

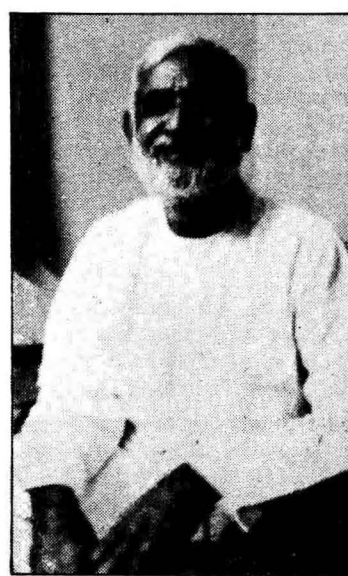
In an emergent situation the Governor of a State has the power to promulgate an Ordinance with the specific limitation that the Ordinances will cease to exist six weeks after the reassembly of the legislature.

"To my horror is discovered some 256 Ordinances being kept alive in Bihar from a period of nine months to 14 years?" recounts Wadhwa. This obviously meant that the Executive was ruling through temporary legislation to perpetuate its own legislative power.

"My concern was specifically that such manipulative powers could well become the norm and be used in a more repressive way, possibly in the whole country, if not exposed. "And thus began Wadhwa's important single-minded effort to first collect relevant data.

His pains-taking research produced a comprehensively documented and cogently argued book titled 'Fraud on the Constitution'. The book was his first milestone; both clearly argued and statistically dense, it had the desired effect on the intellectuals and the judiciary.

"The next step of course was to move the Supreme Court, which requires that under Article 32 the case must be one of the specific violation of the fundamental rights of the people of Bihar." On January 15, 1983, Wadhwa moved the SC against the State of Bihar, The Governor of Bihar and the Union of India.



Here another myth exploded for Wadhwa who found that the functioning of the SC court was in itself a subject for further research. "I found to my dismay that the judiciary is even more arbitrary than the Executive?" and goes on to explain how by an interesting system of arbitrarily changing the order of listing of a case judgement can be deferred indefinitely.

Wadhwa's case was finally decided on December 20, 1986 by a Constitution Bench under Chief Justice P.N. Bhagwati. Yet another crusade lurks in his sombre eyes as he discusses the possibility of exposing the working of the SC. "But without access to data it might well not have a case. And let us not forget that even as we take the executive to court, criticising the Chief Justice amounts to contempt and can find myself behind bars for that," he adds wryly.

Continued on page 15, col. 4



BARE-ALL-DARE-ALL

A report on the myth, tinsel and reality of Indian film journalism

Preminder Singh

Film Journals in India have multiplied in the last decade and account for a staggering 20 lakhs plus readership of which over 5 lakhs is in English. But it has been mainly a multiplication of trivia and titillation. In an era that has seen cinema mature from merely entertainment to a serious art form, Indian film journals have evolved from being star crazy in the 50s & 60s to bitchy and bare-all in the 70s and 80s.

The bitchiness of *STARDUST* in the early 70s was a welcome relief from the adoration and adulation of *FILMFARE* and *SCREEN*. Shobha (Kilachand) De writing 'Neetas Natter' in *STARDUST* took the film world by storm. "She erupted like a volcano, her biting prose (tinged with purple and even yellow) started a whole new trend of bitchy, personalised, peeping tom journalism which has lived up the magazines . . . but also broken all the norms of journalistic ethics" (*GENTLEMAN* Nov '86).

MIRCH MASALA

She shocked not only by her complete disregard for the high and mighty but by her refreshing use of language freely interspersing Hindi with her vitriolic English. But what was fresh and exciting in the 70s is stale and tried in the 80s. "Now that Sridevi is back in the arms of her Bengali lover and no longer the *haddi* in Rekha's *Kabab* the senior actress is ready to forgive and forget the *himmatwali's* trespasses . . . the two *sahelis* . . .". And while "Mahesh was *ekdum* cool (some one) was striking a *dukhi* Meena Kumari pose . . . slippery Sunju Baba is still playing his *billi-chuha* game . . ." (*STARDUST* Jan '87).

Shobha left and with it her flair for bitchiness. Now it's just viciousness. We hear of Rekha the "dusky actress'es (saw) dusty



and empty head (as she) . . . gave me one look and hissed 'how dare you come here, get off my sets', (so) I walked out without creating a scene with the raving and ranting Rekha. After all I only fight my opponents when they are my (mental) size. Others like empty headed Rekha I'd rather ignore." Meow! (*STARDUST* Jan '87).

GOSSIP SCANDAL PORN

If you are interested in Indian Cinema the magazines *not* to read are *STAR AND STYLE*, *CINE BLITZ*, *SHOWTIME*, *SCREEN*, *FILM MIRROR*, *FILMFARE* and especially *STARDUST*. The names change, the gossip remains the same, "Filmdom is buzzing with the late night meetings between Sanjay Dutt and Bhavna at the Holiday Inn Coffee Shop (who) we have it is promoting Tina's cause with Sanjay (who) it seems is softening up and having second thoughts about Richa . . . But the Dutt family have firmly instructed their Sanju that they don't like the idea of Tina at all." (*CINE BLITZ* Dec '86).

If you don't like gossip there's always scandal or porn.

In this make believe world of bare-all-dare-all, Silk Smita & Disco Shanti, films like 'Hot Nights' & 'Sex by Rape', bigamous marriages and love children, fabulous wealth and tinsel glamour, which country are we living in? Is it the same country staggering from crisis to crisis, from communalism to anti-nationalism, from corruption to barbarism, from a 4% growth rate to 60% illiteracy rate? Is this the same country of demure modesty and arranged marriages? Is this the 5000 years of culture with which the film elite is going to spring into the 21st Century while the rest of the country plans a giant leap backward into the 17th?

Luckily the job of bringing the film world back to reality is well done by one film quarterly — and a couple of English magazines not devoted exclusively to film journalism.

Myth And Reality

Madhu Jain (*INDIA TODAY* (IT) May 31) for example does an excellent piece on how "Big is now beautiful . . . in the studios of Bombay, Madras and

Hyderabad . . . Movie Moghuls are hitting back (at the Video invasion) through sheer outsize fantasy . . . for 'Sultanate' 400 truckloads of sand were brought in to create a desert in the middle of Bombay, a huge arena resembling the Coliseum in Rome dominates the sets of 'Singhasan' and in the Nov. 30 issue she describes how screen writers are "turning to terrorism for their themes . . . it is the new yeast giving Hindi Cinema a lift . . . life has overtaken cinema and left it far behind . . . and realism has finally found a place of respect in tinsel town". Says writer Sachin Bhowmick "Today the public claps for patriotic dialogue, until recently it walked out during the National Anthem". Indranil Banerjee (IT Dec 31) also does an excellent analysis of the moves to revive Calcutta as a film centre while S.H. Venkatramani (IT Nov. 30) explains the crisis in the Tamil Film Industry where "In 1985 more than 400 Tamil Films were under production of which 190 got censor board certificates".

Both the *ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY* (GUFTAGU) and *SUNDAY* (KHAAS BAAT, CHITRALOGAM) have succumbed to the formula — sexy photographs and scandalous gossip — but Bhawna Somaya (*IMPRINT* Nov. '86) removes the glamour and probes "Overworked, insecure and constantly in the public eye film-stars . . (who) have to deal with more stress than most people. Some escape, others just crack up . . . it is a ruthless world where the box office is the only loyalty . . . love depends on one's status, where ego's are trampled, self esteem and relationships flaunted for vested interests . . . only the fittest can survive . . . some hit the bottle . . .". Guru Dutt sought release in death, Vinod Khanna in spirituality, Meena Kumari in alcoholism, Parveen Babi in anonymity, Sanjay Dutt in drugs, Amitabh in isolation, Mithun Chakraborty in self pity, Sareeka in EST, Hema Malini in an illegitimate marriage. And all of them have their own cures! "Dharmendra & Anil Kumar go jogging, Ashok Kumar locks himself in the bathroom, Sridevi swallows dosas, Shashi Kapoor drinks Vodka, Sareeka makes a trunk call to Bombay, Shabana begins to sing, Poonam writes her diary".

Ajit Duara (*IMPRINT* Dec. '86) is looking for the new cinema. What happened after M.S. Sathyu's incredible first film 'Garam Hawa' and Benegal's 'Ankur' in the mid seventies? "For the first time Bombay had produced a movie without stars and without songs".

The new cinema he feels went wrong in transplanting a western cinematic structure and imposing it on an alien culture. "The feeling of liberation from the vice like grip of the *masala* film industry was too much". The new cinema abandoned the centuries old Ram Leela & Kathakali tradition from which the song and dance routine in Hindi movies had descended. They ignored "the natural structure of Indian cinema and adopted the techniques of Italian neorealism and aspects of French new wave."

The best magazine on the subject is an English quarterly *CINEMA INDIA INTERNATIONAL*. The Oct-Dec. issue contains features on Otto Preminger, women films, pornography in cinema (inevitable) and special reports on International film festivals-Alpina where Mahesh Bhatt won an award for 'Janam' Karlovy Vary where Ramesh Sharma's New Delhi Times won the Opera Prima award, Lo-Carno where Chakraborty's *DEBASHISHU* (with Smita Patil) won 2 awards.

India's Marilyn Monroe

But the best article is on the star system in Indian Cinema, particularly "Sridevi star goddess, sex symbol empress of the Hindi Cinema. Writing in Barthes' semiological vein, Priya Sarukkai - Chabria says "True some stars are artistes but most seem successfully packaged products". She describes the representation of women on screen as "Voyeurism implicit in identification, with the sadism inherent in conquest, thus enjoining the male viewer to partake in a remorseless, relentless bacchanalia . . . enormous hoardings proclaim 'this is Sridevi', an icon of female sexuality presented in shining black shorts. Indeed her costumes hold the promise of the double bind, they reveal for our carnality and then cover her to satisfy our moral urges . . . her inviting face offering no resistance or history, serves up the most prized feminine quality-absolute submissiveness . . . (while) the mouth — the organ of communication and sexuality — is reduced by Sridevi to a symbol of erotic hype and supplication. Like other symbols she keeps her lips parted in photographs, ever ready to receives so to speak a kiss."

And finally a new year's gift from *STARDUST* for "Mandakini a raincoat, so that her producers, directors, distributors, stop wetting her in film after film. For with all the bathing and baring in waterfalls all the year through, Raj Kapoor's Ganga is no longer mail".

Selections from The Psalms

What are the psalms of the Old Testament? Are they mere songs praising the glory of God or are they the work of some truly remarkable poets, full of beauty and a vision that transcends the purely religious?

To me, the psalms symbolise all that is sheer poetry in the Bible. The essence of all that is pure and beautiful, simple and memorable. None can arrest their melody for they mean different things to different people. And even if you go back to them after a long time, as I have done, they will evoke quite different responses in you. The music changes. The words acquire different meanings. The colours, the nuances, the magic of the imagery: everything alters every time you go back to them. . . .

The facades crumble. The soul is bared. As tears, like the first monsoon showers, and laughter, like waves of the surging sea, mingle in hymn and prayer, love and joyous celebration.

Pritish Nandy

Psalm 1

Blessed are they who reject the advice of sinners, spurn their company, and refuse to share their scorn. They celebrate the way of the Lord:

all night and day they think of him.

Like trees beside a river, they bear fruit each season. Their leaves do not wither; their blossoms never fail.

Sinners are like chaff before the wind:

they cannot stand among the righteous.

On the day of judgement, they shall not be safe.

For the Lord looks after his people while sinners walk alone.

Psalm 15

Lord, who will find refuge in your tabernacle?

He who is righteous and speaks the truth; he who does not slander others nor hurts his neighbours. He who speaks out against wrongdoers and respects those who are honest;

he who keeps a promise even if it hurts.

He who is not a moneylender; and he who refuses to testify against the innocent for the sake of easy reward.

It is he who shall stand steadfast forever.

The
Forum
Gazette

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Editorial (Camp) Office
4 Bhagwan Das Road
New Delhi-110001.
Phone: 385270, 385042
Tlx: 315220 HBLK FOR GAZETTE

SGPC Appoints Pro-militant High Priests

From Harbir Singh Bhanwar in Amritsar



Prof. Darshan Singh 'Ragi', new acting Jathedar of the Akal Takht and Gyani Puran Singh : Acting Head Priest of the Golden Temple.

AMRITSAR: In a swift move the S.G.P.C. Executive Committee in its meeting held in Amritsar on December 24 last, "sacked" two high priests, the Akal Takht Chief, Giani Kirpal Singh and the head priest of the Golden Temple, Giani Sahib Singh. Appointed instead of them were Darshan Singh Ragi and Giani Puran Singh, as acting Jathedar of the Akal Takht and the

Golden Temple respectively.

According to reliable sources, the members belonging to the ruling Akali Dal opposed these "replacements". Giani Kirpal Singh reportedly tendered his resignation at the eleventh hour under "pressure" from the SGPC authorities, but according to the official version given by the SGPC Publicity Wing on phone, both the high priests were "sacked".

Both, Giani Kirpal Singh and Giani Sahib Singh became very controversial after 'Operation Blue Star' because of their statements broadcast on the national network of Doordarshan. They were also criticised for 'exonerating' President Zail Singh without his personal appearance at the Akal Takht after he had been declared as a "Tankhaiya" (guilty of religious misconduct) at the time of the

"All World Sikh Convention" held under the aegis of the five Sikh high priests in Amritsar on September 2, 1984. They were also accused of being "lenient" towards the Punjab Chief Minister, Mr. Surjit Singh Barnala while "punishing" him for ordering the police action in the Golden Temple Complex on April 30 last.

Targets of Militant Sikhs

Both have survived an attempt each on their life by the militant Sikhs in 1985. The "Sarbat Khalsa" convention organised by militant Sikhs at the Akal Takht on January 26 last, and "dismissed" both these high priests and appointed Bhai Jasbir Singh, a nephew of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as Jathedar of the Akal Takht. Since he was in jail, Bhai Gurdev Singh was appointed as acting "Jathedar". He, too, was arrested during the police action on April 30 and thereafter, the militant Sikhs appointed Baba Gurbachan Singh Manochahl as acting "Jathedar" in his place. According to SGPC sources, the SGPC authorities consulted the militants and had taken them into confidence before making these two appointments. These appointments are likely to be endorsed either during the next "All World Sikh Convention" called by the breakaway Akali Dal led by Mr. Parkash Singh Badal in Amritsar on February, 10 or

the next "Sarbat Khalsa" convention sometime later on.

Prof. Darshan Singh is a well known ragi who has been honoured by the SGPC, and the Punjab Government for his contribution to the Sikh-Panth, especially after 'Operation Blue Star'. He was detained for a long time by the Haryana Government and was released recently. Cassettes containing his devotional songs and speeches have been in circulation in large numbers within and outside Punjab.

Giani Puran Singh is currently one of the "granthis" of the Golden Temple. He, too, remained in jail 1984-85 for his alleged association with militant Sikhs. During 'Operation Blue Star', he was trapped inside the sanctum sanctorum. He was instrumental in negotiating between the Government and militants at the time of the April 30 police action.

Both the new high priests are known for their pro-militant stance and are very popular among them. When contacted, both refused to say anything until they are formally installed as high priests in accordance with Sikh traditions. Prof. Darshan Singh in an informal chat with newsmen in Chandigarh after his appointment, disclosed that he would not indulge in politics and would confine himself to religious obligations and duties.

Marching, Painting, Performing, and an Auction for Communal Harmony

By Lakhinder Vohra

In the backdrop of the grim events of Punjab and the violence in various parts of the country, the formation of the Committee for Communal Harmony by a group of intellectuals offers respite and some hope for the future.

Recently set up, the 48-member committee has been active attempts to spread the message of peace and brotherhood amongst Delhites.

The hectic activity of the past fortnight from 7th-18th December culminated in a "peoples" march from Ramlila ground to Town Hall when more than 25,000 enthusiasts took to the streets. Among the members of the committee who led the march were former ambassador to the Soviet Union, I.K. Gujral, Air Marshal Arjan Singh, Lt. General JS Aurora, Supreme Court advocate Danial Latifi, former High Court judge Rajinder Sachar, Prof. Randhir Singh, Bhagwant Singh Dilawari and students and faculty members of Nehru and Delhi University.

This motley group of professionals, schoolkids, college students, journalists and artists marched as a body, holding aloft placards and well designed posters and sporting communal harmony badges. Remarkable Latifi, "This march speaks for the teeming millions who want

peace. This should be an eye opener for politicians who espouse the cause of peace and do nothing concrete about it". Spreading their activities to many parts of the city with 20 public gatherings, 100 'nukkad' (Street corner) meetings, padyatras, poster workshops, exhibitions, filmshows and even a painting competition to bring children into the ambit of the peace. Movement, the committee for Communal Harmony helped Delhites to express their intention to live in peace and harmony with one another. A high point of the effort, an event in itself was the "Art Auction" on the lawns of Rabindra Bhawan. Among the 300-odd people were a whole crowd of artists, making the gathering a veritable who's who of the capital. "Even though the atmosphere was far from competitive, the final bids were 50 to 60 percent higher than the market prices" said painter Manjeet Bawa, adding, "Interestingly, of the 85 artists who donated their works, 30 percent were women 20 percent Sikhs and 18 percent Muslims. The auction proceeds which went above Rs. 2. lakh attracted professional as well as amateur buyers. MF Hussain's 'Buddha and Gandhi' fetched the highest price. Marked at Rs 3,000 Pran Talwar bought it for

Rs. 18,500. A discordant note, some felt, was struck when the "professionals" moved in-present also were representatives from the Dhoomimal Art gallery, Kumar Art gallery, Arvindo gallery and The National gallery of Modern art.

Mixed Response

On the whole, the Committee's programmes which began on a positive note, drew a mixed response. The 24 public meetings spread over Ghazia-

bad and Faridabad failed to evoke the desired response. Few came.

Perhaps daunted by the chilly winds. This correspondent visited the public gathering at Tikonia Chowk in Jamia Nagar. A small crowd of 60 most of them Muslims, were in attendance. In an emotion charged speech, MA Javed, the convenor of the Committee criticized the government for not curtailing the activities of the senas that had sprouted in the capital in the

name of religion. When asked why the turnout was so meagre, 68-year-old Abdul Ghafoor, a clerk at the Jamia Millia Islamia University replied, "In a congregation like this, it should not be apparent that the speakers are aligned to one party or the other. Everybody here seems to have an opinion that the speakers are aligned to the CPI(M) and their aim is to spread Communism. Moreover not ma-

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Jan Natya Manch (JANM) staging their spell binding anti-communal play 'Bhaichara ka Apharan' at Miranda House at Delhi University recently.



Courtesy: Sunday Mail

Baan Workers Struggle for Survival

Gazette News Service

For nearly 40,000 families who live in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, a few hours away from the capital by road, 39 years of Independence have brought few benefits. On the contrary, they were better off in the days of the Raj. For in this area at the foothills of the Siwaliks, known as the "ghad", poorly irrigated, heavily denuded because of the mass deforestation of the Himalayan slopes, able to produce only one crop a year, the population is dependant for survival on forest produce. The British colonial rules recognised this fact, which the rulers of independent India choose to ignore. (See Box).

Says Sushila Devi: "It is 15 to 20 kilometres to the Primary Health Centre. There is no road to get there, or the hospital 50 kilometres away. A sick child often dies on the way. There is no education and what good would education be anyway?"

She comes from one of 40,000 or so families whose only means of livelihood is the making of "baan", a superior type of rope, mainly used for weaving charpais.

For nearly two decades these families, amongst the most backward and poverty stricken section of our population, remained silent victims of the exploitative nexus between the forest authorities and forest contractors. But Sushila's words reflect a significant change, a new awareness of their victimisation in the 'ghad' people, and their determination to fight it. Sushila is a member of the **Baan Mazdoor Union**, with its 1500 members, as well as of the larger **Ghad Shetra Mazdoor Morcha**. The Union is fighting for the forest rights of its members, while the Morcha, started in January 1986, with a growing membership in 98 villages, claimed to be between 25,000 to 30,000 today, is carrying on a "sangharsh" for fair

prices for the raw material as well as for the finished product.

THE CONTRACTOR NETWORK

Baan is made out of the jungle grass 'bhavar' which grows abundantly in the ghad. Deprived by the authorities of their right to cut the bhavar freely, the baan workers are forced to buy the grass through a system of contractors, sub-contractors and middlemen. Nepalese labour is brought in for cutting, because under conditions of bonded labour, the Nepalese are paid less and controlled more easily than local labour. Migrant Rajasthanis bring in their camels to transport bhavar, again under a sub-contractor. Forest Corporation officials carry out bundling into lots, of at least 50 quintals, approximately Rs. 7500 a lot, and are in charge of sales or auctions. The poor baan workers who have no capital can never hope to meet this price, which the Corporation demands in advance. The result is the contractor steps in and the baan worker, for whose benefit the Corporation was formed, is forced to buy from the traders. Before the Corporation entered the picture the workers could get loans and buy from the forest contractors, thus saving at least one step in the middlemen chain. How the government reconciles the reality of the Corporation-contractor nexus with the avowed objective of abolishing the contractor system in a mystery!

Another inexplicable condition in the whole matter is the continuing agreement under which the Forest Corporation supplies bhavar to paper mills at the fixed rate of Rs. 40 per quintal when the wholesale price of bhavar is Rs. 155 to 160 and the retail price can go up to Rs. 225! (With inflation these prices have risen even further but the mill rate remains the same!) The Corporation tells baan workers that it cannot change the paper mill rates. With the result both the Forest



Bhavar Fibres being twisted together by women.

Department and Forest Corporation make up their losses, and their profits, through selling bhavar to the baan makers.

According to an ICSSR study the finished baan is sold at Rs. 6 per kilo on the market, out of which the worker gets only Rs. 2. To add to the worker's disadvantage, bhavar is sold by lots, which are 'mixed', with both good and bad grass. But there is no way to complain for the trader says, "take it or leave it". The poor worker suffers again because while the baan price has remained relatively stagnant, the bhavar rates have gone up. From Re 1 per kilo a couple of years ago, the wholesale rate is now Rs. 1.60 or more.

BAAN WORKERS SPEAK OF STRUGGLE

"This is jungle produce. The government does not put in any effort to make it grow. Why

can't we get it free?" asks Chanu Ram, a Union leader. "We will fight the government for our grass. The government has not opened factories here, there is no other work for us. We have no land. When we can earn our livelihood, it is being taken away." He speaks without passion but with a touch of anger in his firmness. "We meet our needs from the jungle. We are ready to give our lives for our rights. Even if all the police department come, we won't give up. We will die for our rozgain, our mazdoori, our haq."

The Baan Mazdoor Union dates back to 1978 when workers first organised in Mirzapur Polgaon but their voice went unheard by the authorities. In 1980, the Vikalp Social Organisation which had been working with unions, came to the area to see if there was anything they could do. Their first focus became raw material, followed,

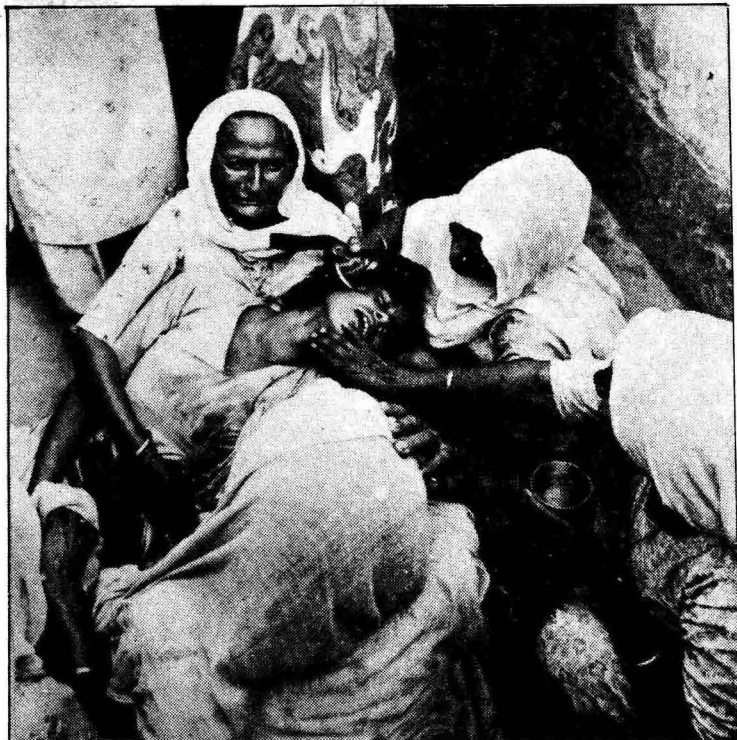
by forest rights. Their presence was resented by all the vested interests, the local administration and forest officials included, for many were involved in the web of corruption, common to such backward areas. "We were accused of 'instigating' the baan workers" a Vikalp member explained. "Local administration said we were threatening and intimidating the workers!" Says Chanu Ram, "It is hunger which threatens us, not Vikalp!" Vikalp advice and assistance helped to mobilise the exploited villagers and on 5 January 1986 and Ghad Shetra Mazdoor Morcha launched its "sangharsh", struggle, for forest rights and a fair price for bhavar.

MORCHA ULTIMATUM

Even this met with no response. At a public meeting on October 1st 1986 the Morcha

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The agony persists

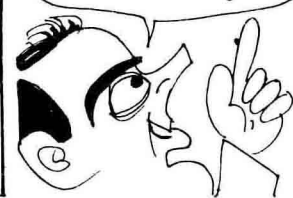


NEWSHOUND

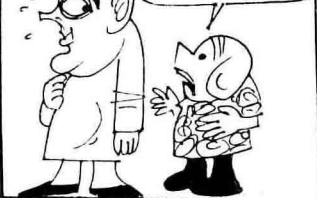
I'VE EXPLAINED OUR PUNJAB STAND TO THE RUSSIANS, AMERICANS AND BRITISH.



"AND ALSO TO THE OPPOSITION PARTIES!"



HAVE YOU EXPLAINED YOUR PUNJAB STAND TO PUNJABIS?



By Rap



Women Baan workers are deeply involved in the Ghad Shetra Mazdoor Morcha.

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announced that unless its demands were met, the workers would cut bhavar forcibly from 1st December, when the cutting season begins, and claim their rights.

Morcha representatives who met the District Magistrate, the DFO and the Corporation's General Manager, were assured at several meetings that action would be taken, but nothing was done. Thousands of baan workers prepared to go into the forest and force a confrontation. But, on November 29, the local DM intervened and asked the Morcha representatives to meet him on December 5.

They agreed, and at this meeting the DM suggested that they call off the *sangharsh*, offered them a loan of 80 lakhs (to 100 villages), to be repaid, if at all, on the easiest terms, and promised them 25 godowns for storing bhavar. Morcha representatives refused the offer, determined to obtain their rights. When these were mentioned to the DM, he allegedly remarked "Are these villagers 'government's ghar ke jawai'? Why should they get bhavar free and the Corporation lose money? Which is more important, they or the government?" At a meeting the next day the Morcha decided on December 22nd as the final date of negotiation.

POLICE THREATS

After this meeting police came to the villages. "They told us women, 'You better stop your men, or *goli challe gi*.' "Usha, one of the active *mahilas* of the Morcha — there are about 500 to 600 of them—told us "So we told them we have been working for our rights all these days, so we won't stop. We will not only not stop our men, but we will take our sisters and our children and go to the jungle! So the police threatened us 'You won't stop your men! So there will be goondas there and they will *baisti karo* you (humiliate and disgrace you)'. I told them that we will call out and all the villagers will come, so you can bring your guns!" Young, fiery Sushila added indignantly, "The police told us 'You women have no business in this matter!' I

told them it is our right to be in the *sangharsh* because our children ask us for food when they are hungry. If there is a decision on the 22nd December and we get our rights, it is good. Otherwise, on the 23rd, women, children, all of us will go to the forest. That is our final decision!"

Morcha members have refused to buy bhavar from the contractors since December 5th insisting that they will continue the boycott until fair rates are imposed. They have bought the grass from other places and point out that bhavar smuggled in from Haryana is cheaper than the local produce. Some workers have a little stock left over. But how long can they continue the boycott? This is their only means of survival and when they tell contractors they will not buy bhavar, the contractors ask how long can they carry on, without it?

ON GOING STRUGGLE

Vikalp members and workers, both, fear the onslaught of state terrorism. There was a massive

U.P. police presence at the 1st December meeting, backed up by an equal number of armed constabulary. Routine police harassment and trumped up charges already exist. The baan workers' *sangharsh* is just one incident in the continuous struggle being waged all over the country wherever the poor, weaker sections of our society face the vicious nexus of local vested interests, a corrupt administration and political pressures supported by an obliging police force. The ghad area is a traditional "vote bank" for the Congress (I). Any kind of organisation of the local population to fight for their rights, any growing awareness of people's power, constitutes a threat to be fought against by local MLAs and their cohorts.

THE FOREST IS OUR LIFE

A campaign has already been launched against the Morcha and recently the Nav Bharat Times carried a report on how the villagers of the ghad are against conservation! Chanu Ram states quittedly, "None of us want to loot the forest as the

government accuses us of doing. The forest is our life!" There is a quiet desperation in the Morcha members, but total determination. And no illusions. Some of the villages have been included in the Rajaji National Park, a disaster for the residents. For they are now forbidden to enter the area and all forest produce is denied to them. One Morcha member comments bitterly "There is no need to look after 40,000 persons! But the wild life must be looked after!"

UNDER COLONIAL RULE

Access to forests of villagers was regulated and they enjoyed certain rights formulated in written documents. These included free firewood, free grazing, wood twice a year for house construction and repairs, wood for weddings and deaths, right to collect herbs. The residents of 'listed villages' (adjacent to the forest) could take out, free, headloads of bhavar grass for 21 days in the year, while other village residents also have certain free cutting rights. The British also engaged local labour for cutting bhavar, recognising the

importance of this regular income for the locals.

UNDER THE RULERS OF INDEPENDENT INDIA

Initially the villagers enjoyed these traditional rights but a daily fee was introduced. However, in 1961-62 the forests of the area were "handed over" to forest contractors for exploitation. These and their henchmen told villagers they had no rights — although they still exist in the documents — and that it was illegal for them to enter the forest. The authorities supported the contractors. In 1974 the Forest Corporation was established. The purpose was to ensure scientific "management" of the forest, to involve the local people in the management, and, above all, to do away with the system of contractors for the benefit of the locals and the government, by eliminating middlemen! Instead the corporation has become the biggest contractor of all and the chain of middlemen has become even longer. The rights of the villagers which have never been formally abrogated are denied.

H.P. Women Protest Liquor Contracts

Gazette News Service

One eighty five rural women staged a dharna outside the residence of the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh on the 17th of November to protest at the massive increase in liquor tekas (vends) in their villages. The HP State Government earned more than Rs. 68 crore in 1985-86 on the sale of liquor licenses alone and this increasing alcoholism is having a serious impact on the life of these hill women.

"Our homes have no proper electricity supply, no good drinking water. There are no schools for our children — and yet we have a government-licensed liquor store in our village," one woman protested. With a bottle of desi liquor costing more than twice the minimum daily wages of Rs. 12, the financial impacts on the family are great. In addition, both women and children face ever increasing physical violence.

Women in over 60 mahila mandals spread across H.P. have mounted a campaign against liquor. Their demands are not for prohibition, but for the right to a democratic say in whether a liquor vend should be located in their village. The mahila mandals are demanding that a liquor license should only be granted if a 2/3 majority is in its favour in the local panchayat.

These demands were first framed at a meeting held in Jagjitnagar in February '86, which was attended by over 2,000 women following a series of Government of India sponsored camps to raise public opinion against alcoholism. When they received no reply from the State Government to their memorandum, 500 women marched to the district headquarters in Solan to stage a dharna outside the DC's office. He assured them that three of the most troublesome vends

would be closed and police protection offered to women in other danger spots. On the last night of the old licenses (31st April), women sat on the road outside a particular vend to ensure the DC's promise was enforced, only to discover a new license had been granted and a truck was arriving with the new liquor stock.

Disillusioned by this betrayal, the women decided to go in person to present their memorandum to the CM, and the idea of the padyatra was born. The growing strength of the women produced a backlash from the menfolk of the area who stopped many women from participating in the march so, instead of the expected 500 women marching, only 200 were able to come. Despite their small numbers, they developed a great sense of strength and unity, symbolised by Ganya Devi, the old woman bent double with arthritis, who, bearing

a lighted lamp, led their march up through Simla to the CM's residence. The CM received an eight woman deputation and accepted the memorandum, but the women refused to leave until he had given them a firm written commitment to consider their demands and discuss the results of this with them. Any change in current excise provisions can only be instituted by the Council of Ministers, and the women are demanding this should be done immediately before another set of vends are licensed for 87-88.

The CM agreed to inform them by the 31st March of his decision. The women returned, aware that their struggle is only just beginning. They plan to file a writ petition to support their case before the High Court and in the meantime, will spread their net wider to involve women all across HP in their campaign.

Two First Rate Punjabi Plays in Delhi

B.S. Rattan

The first two days of the six-day Punjabi Theatre Festival at Kamani auditorium, organized recently by the Punjabi Academy, Delhi, featured two first rate plays from Punjab. The agony of Punjab at present is so grim and heart-rending that all literary, cultural or artistic activity seems so unreal. Theatre, as an art-form, however, offers a challenge which, if taken in right earnest, can not only deliver us from the paralysing anguish but also give us a will to fight against the rampaging evil by generating clear awareness of what is eating away at our healthy social fibre. It is to this object that the contemporary Punjabi theatre is boldly addressing itself. This was quite evident from these two plays the Delhi theatre-goers had the privilege to see.

Ajmer Singh Aulakh's adaptation of Waryam Sandhu's story 'Bhajian Baheen' (The Broken Arms) in his dramatic version of the same title, presented on November 30, concretises on stage with intensity the suffering of the common man caught in the whirl of murderous politics in Punjab. Clearly realized in purely dramatic terms it is an incisive analysis of pervasive economic and political malaise there.

Ajmer Singh Aulakh has a masterly sense of proportion which gives such an edge to his argument that all elements of

drama — acting, dialogues, light-effects, music, and movements — coalesce to create many a moment which in the still centre of its silence grants us a complete vision of the turmoil of human passions. The fact that his dramatic instinct is rooted in the soil of Punjab, makes his theatre a degree of directness, which captures the essence of reality.

Atamjit and Aulakh both, are the most outstanding playwrights in Punjabi today; and both of them are also practical men of theatre. While at the hands of Aulakh the theatrical means lend themselves to his head-on collision with the facts of life around, and peel off its veneers, Atamjit builds his meaning by a delicate handling of these very elements to the projection of a serious purpose. With Aulakh the fury of passions is dynamically framed in the theatrical mode; with Atamjit the theatrical mode itself becomes a technique of discovery.

On December 1, Atamjit's 'Rishteyan Da Ki Rakhiye Naan' (How shall we sound the human ties) based upon Manto's famous story 'Tobha Tek Singh', was a production of high merit because the excellence of the artistic aspect was totally in service of a profound meaning, charged with social significance and individual agony so real to the people of Punjab today.

Theatre gains in meaning

when it can be received as a complete metaphor of life. However, theatre becomes a metaphor without being made one consciously, because its "being" is metaphorical. Atamjit's distinction lies in the fact that he does not just rest with letting theatre "be", but consciously goes about "making" it into a metaphor so that his plays are at once metaphors of theatre and life. He creates an aesthetic distance, sustains it, and retains it throughout the duration of a play.

'Rishteyan Da Ki Rakhiye Naan' is built in a deliberately languid rhythm, inexorable, and, at times, almost monotonous. This rhythm concretises the choked, stalled life that is being portrayed and also, by contrast, sets off the poignant suffering of those in the cuckoo's nest as well as the violence of human passions around. The speech rhythm and the music blend easily, the latter punctuating the dialogue, and the total import buttressed by careful lighting.

While Aulakh uses the robustness of Punjabi language to make his impact, Atamjit concentrates upon its nuances in terms of pause, emphasis, repetition and ambiguity. Exuberance and celebration, even that of sorrow, are the fundamental principles of Aulakh's artistic design; restraint and evocative suggestiveness govern the theat-

rical options of Atamjit.

That the plays like those of Aulakh and Atamjit are doing a regular round of performance in Punjab in an eye-opener to us in Delhi in two ways: one, that the artists and intellectuals in Punjab have the courage and honesty enough to offer sane analyses of the Punjab situation; two, the fact that the people of Punjab respond to these plans is a positive sign that the essential core of Punjabi culture and society is still relatively healthy, despite all the vicious political encroachments.

By sponsoring these two plays

Punjabi Academy Delhi have, indeed, broken new ground because in the past their general emphasis has been to provide superficial entertainment of an effete nature only. In fact, the remaining four plays on the days to follow were nothing but consumerist and opportunistic appropriation of theatre. And the seminars on theatre under the presidency of Balwant Gargi, who is only an anachronism of Punjabi theatre at present, were mere class-room exercises. The papers presented were no better than undergraduate essays. No wonder the attendance was so thin.

TO OUR READERS

BEST WISHES

FOR

A BETTER

1987



A Good Man Fasts for Punjab

From Brijender S. Panwar in Bombay



Sadhu Mohan with Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora after breaking his fast in Bombay.

To wipe out hatred from hearts—that is a mission being undertaken by Sadhu Mohan, a wandering dervish from Kerala, who has been travelling all over India on foot spreading the message of love. After completing the first phase of his seven months long pad-yatra through Punjab in February, 1985, he seeks to extend his campaign to the national scene. With this view in mind, he undertook a three-day fast from December 26 at the famous Cross Maidan in South Bombay. Lt. General J.S. Arora was present on the concluding day,

December 28, when Sadhu broke his fast.

Recalling how he ventured to take up his mission on Punjab, the Sadhu said, "After the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi and the Delhi riots, seeing my beard, a villager in the South remarked, 'you look like a Sikh, take care, you may be attacked'. This remark made me think of Sikhs and with it came the urge of meeting them."

With no fixed itinerary this lean, lanky monk in saffron robes, began his march for peace at Alipur village in North Delhi on February 10. The only

fixed schedule in the course of his march was to head for the Beas river near Amritsar, take a potful of water from it and offer it to the first farmer he met. This was a symbolic gesture to the Sikhs for whom the demand for more water, is an important aspect of the present crisis.

He faced no problem until he entered Haryana. At Panipat, on March 21, he encountered a piquant situation when he tried to organise a procession from a temple to a Gurudawara. Fearing trouble, the district authorities disallowed it. A few local people

accused him of being a Sikh agent. As a result, he was thrown out of the Dharamshala where he was staying.

Undeterred, he continued his onward journey to Punjab. His padyatra coincided with a number of significant developments, namely, the signing of the Accord, the assassination of Sant Longowal, elections and formation of the Barnala Ministry in the State. In his limited capacity, Sadhu Mohan believes he contributed his bit by educating the rural Punjabis in his own way.

Opinion On Terrorism

What was his opinion on the rising terrorism in Punjab? The Sadhu replied that the rationale of terrorism, so rampant in Punjab now, was in the interest of those who thrive on the people's despair and those who seek to perpetuate that despair. The 'dissidents' (he chose to use the word dissidents for terrorists) believed that with each strike the number of embittered people will increase. It was the duty of all right-thinking people to contain that embitterment. According to him, the terrorists calculate that the reactive violence of the State would further widen the bitterness. The inherent tragedy in Punjab he realised, was that it would become another Beirut if things go on as they are at present.

Blaming the politicians for the current atmosphere of violence and suspicion, Sadhu Mohan said: "At present there is no political solution to the Punjab

problem. Like-minded non-political groups working together in the strife-torn state of Punjab can only help in defusing the situation. In all this he stressed the fact that people were larger than politics and statecraft and that at that level it was easier and more practical to seek and offer forgiveness.

Why did Sadhu Mohan chose Bombay for staging the fast instead of Punjab? "Maharashtra is the only state in the country which has shown great concern towards the Punjab crisis. More than 13 non-political groups from Maharashtra visited Punjab during the years of crisis. So, my intention was to broaden the platform of such groups and to take their co-operation in solving the problem."

The Hindustani Andolan also extended its full support to Sadhu Mohan for the campaign undertaken by him "with a view to unite all peace-loving Sikhs and Hindus and create an atmosphere where people can forgive and forget all that has happened".

Commenting on his future programme, the Sadhu said that half a dozen non-political groups met in Delhi in mid-December to chalk out a constructive strategy and launch a joint campaign for communal harmony and national integration. "We have invited some other groups for the next meeting schedules to be held on January 16, 17, 1987. We shall be together going to Punjab with a message of love and mutual co-existence, he added.



Playing with fire in Delhi

A Happy New Year Anyway

It is not all easy to wish our readers a happy new year with any measure of conviction. Just as nobody seems to be able to lead the way out of the crisis in Punjab, the situation in the north-east and north Bengal also appears to be assuming intractable proportions. With Delhi dithering with indecision and unable to understand the urge for cultural and political expression by various minority, regional and sub-regional groups, the political system's power of reconciliation and containment by consent appears to be collapsing. There is a noticeable progression in demands for greater autonomy, linguistic recognition and cultural identity being transformed into violent agitation, terrorism and insurgency. Instead of dialogue, accommodation and a mixture of 'carrot and stick', the powers that be seem to have decided to abandon the carrot in preference to the stick, atleast as far as Punjab goes.

What is disheartening is that there is no national leader with a blend of guts, intelligence and charisma who can reach out to the people and touch their hearts while also making it clear that India is not for sale — neither to multinationals nor to mindless law-breakers.

In spite of all the high-tech at his command, and advice from his public school chums, infact because of them, Rajiv Gandhi will be entering 1987 as little more than a leading star in a depressing T.V. serial.

There is little doubt, however, that 1986 was and 1987 will continue to be a happy and prosperous new year for atleast some Indians and certain foreign visitors to this country. Among them can be counted the big Indian industrial houses, especially those tied up with multinationals, commodity traders and speculators, agents of the arms business and international finance capital.

With its high profile advertising, the electronics boom is with us in a big way. Assemblers and importers of computers, videos, fancy communication and control systems have been given easy passage with the shelving of restrictions and controls under FERA and MRTP.

As for ordinary Indians, the high-tech open door policies being pursued by our 21st century government do not offer them much hope in two areas of vital concern: textiles and food.

The textiles policy has taken pains to focus on "fibre flexibility", which means that man made synthetic fibres being used in the mill sector are being favoured with preferential treatment in preference to cotton, which is the backbone of the handloom and powerloom sectors. In spite of various excise concessions and the freedom to import high priced textile machinery to enable the industry to become more competitive, the expected drop in the prices of cloth and garments has not occurred.

If adequate cloth is not within reach of atleast half the population, the same is true of food, not withstanding the debate amongst economists of the exact numbers below the poverty line. And yet there is supposed to be a "surplus" of foodgrains, which in turn is used as a justification for encouraging food exports. Thus in April last year the government decided to allow the export of 2 million tonnes of wheat and 1 million tonnes of rice during 1986-87. Such logic might make sense to exporters and some economists, but not to ordinary Indians.

Given the new religion of high-tech which our rulers swear by, in 1987 we can look forward to more production, newer technology, fewer jobs, stagnant consumption levels and rising discontent. Also to be expected: more extremism and fundamentalism given the fact that we seem to have dumped all our other 'isms' including humanism, into the polluted Ganga. A Happy New Year anyway to our readers.

What Should The Punjabi

Balraj Puri

The anguish of Punjabi Hindus, expressed by Mr. H.R. Khanna, some time ago in his two part article in the Times of India deserves fuller notice and further discussion.

For the Punjab problem has so far been debated in terms of the Sikhs versus the Centre or the Sikhs versus Haryana. It has also been treated as the national interest versus Sikh interest. The entire debate on the problem and policy options have tended to regard Punjabi Hindus as totally irrelevant.

While Mr. Khanna's contribution in reminding us about the existence and plight of this vital community of Punjab is to be welcomed, I am dismayed by the total absence of any guidelines in his article for what should the Hindus do and what should they concretely demand from the governments in New Delhi and Chandigarh.

He rightly bemoans the fact that "for the last three years the Hindus have been at the receiving end of the depredations of the terrorists in Punjab", and equality rightly criticises the wavering and vacillation of the leadership". He concludes that while the ultimate solution lies in a political settlement, "all concerned should wake up to their responsibilities and do something concrete and effective to afford protection to innocent citizens".

Unexceptionable indeed. But what is the ultimate solution and what concrete and effective measure would protect innocent citizens? It is a pity that one of the most distinguished and articulate Punjabi Hindus is unable to give us even the vaguest answer to these crucial questions and offer any advice to this beleaguered and directionless community.

While Mr. Khanna does not suggest what Punjabi Hindus should do, he predicts—not very wrongly—that Hindus in general would do. "Every killing of innocent Hindus", he pertinently warns, "adds another layer of resentment amongst the Hindus else-

where". He warns against the presumption that "the pent up feelings would always remain controlled and not blow up."

To be fairer, he does not welcome the Hindu backlash he apprehends. The "terrible repercussions" of the possible increase in the tempo of the Hindu migration from Punjab, he believes, would please the protagonists of Khalistan.

But if Hindu leaders—more so these who claim to be liberal and secular—fair to provide any outlet to the legitimate anger of the Punjabi Hindus, how would the backlash, Mr. Khanna is worried about, be checked?

Pleas of restraint have little impact unless they can be linked with the self-interest of the people to whom they are addressed. What is, for instance, the self-interest of Hindu immigrants from Punjab and Sikh victims of the 1984 riots in Delhi? To make a common cause against the cult of communal violence and the theory of guilt by association. Was any attempt made by individual or group to mobilise a common protest of the two communities of Punjabis living in Delhi against the Muktars or Hoshiarpur outrage?

Punjabi Hindus, living outside Punjab, had earned an abiding gratitude of their Sikh brethren when they stood against the wrath of their co-religionists during the anti-Sikh riots following Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination. It is their right and duty now to take the initiative in channelising the present sense of insecurity and fear among the Sikh minority outside Punjab into a positive assertion against terrorism in Punjab.

It is difficult to assess the possibility—without trying—of motivating and organising what in the Sikh terminology is called a Shahidi Jatha to offer a non-violent resistance to terrorism. But the concept has a potentiality and, in view of its role in Sikh history, also an emotive appeal for the Sikh masses. Though there is no Gandhi to do a Noakhali in Pun-

jab, his lessons cannot be written off.

Whatever be the limitations of a moral and intellectual approach in directly meeting the challenge of terrorism, it is the only means of isolating the terrorists from the community. There are quite a few Punjabi Hindus who have the requisite moral and intellectual strength to attempt bridging the present sharp divide between the two communities of Punjab. But they made the fatal mistake of concentrating their entire energy in bridging the gap between the Akali Dal and the Centre in a manner which undermined the role of the Dal as a democratic instrument of the Sikh protest, on the one hand, and relegated the crucial question of Hindu-Sikh dialogue in Punjab to the background, on the other.

Punjabi Hindu Interest Not Articulated

Punjabi Hindus have played a vigorous role either as mediators between the Centre and the Sikhs or as representatives of the former. They also tend to regard themselves as an extension of our custodian of the national interest. But rarely have they asserted their role as a sub-regional identity or articulated their interests and demands as a minority of the State? In consequence, not only the Punjabi Hindu interest has suffered neglect, it has also distorted the Punjab problem which, in essence, consists of adjusting claims of the two communities, particularly in the political field.

Much smaller minorities elsewhere have acquired leverage far out of proportion to their numbers than Punjabi Hindus have been able to do. But even in the undivided Punjab, in which they were in a majority, Punjabi Hindus did not seek recognition of their own ethnic-religious identity and rejected the offer of Sikh educationists for the use of two scripts—Gurmukhi and Devanagiri—for the Punjabi language. In the Punjabi

When will the Punjab tragedy end?



Hindus Do?

Suba of the Akali conception, they were again in a majority. But they opted to be in a minority by getting large chunks of Punjabi Hindu areas out of the new state. Even now they are a sizable minority which cannot be ignored in electoral politics.

Even in the last elections, the Akali Dal got only 0.7 per cent more votes than the Congress and owed its victory clearly to the marginal shift in the Hindu votes in its favour.

Why No Demand For Power

Why then does not the Hindu leadership in Punjab address itself to the basic problem of getting a share in political power of the State? Why did the well-intentioned mediators forget to ensure this is the post accord dispensation? Why did not a section of Hindus negotiate with Akali leaders their terms for support in the elections? Why do not they even now demand a share in power?

It will not be possible for the Hindu community to acquire a sense of confidence and security, for administration to be decommunalised and command the trust of all communities and the Punjabi identity to be revived if the vital Hindu minority is completely deprived of a sense of Participation in the affairs of the state.

As this is the crux of the Punjab problem, the ultimate solution, to which Mr. Khanna refers, would depend upon attending to it. Let Punjabi Hindus, take the initiative in starting a dialogue with various Sikh groups for dividing means—constitutional, institutional and conventional—for solving the long and short of the Punjab problems i.e. for sharing of political power by the two communities.

Case For Minority Rights

On the basis of my extensive dialogues with various sections of the Sikhs, I have clearly observed that it is far easier for them to understand and respond to claims of the Punjabi Hindus than those of the nation, or the Centre. For the perceptions about the latter vary divergently whereas minority rights

observed that it is far easier for are based on the same logic.

I have similarly noticed that most Sikhs are visibly disturbed over innocent killings by the terrorists. They are aware of the fact that these killings have the effect of legitimising reprisals against Sikhs outside Punjab for the crimes of the terrorists and are against the Sikh tradition of compassion and sacrifice. If the question of innocent killings could be delinked from other issues on which the right of protest is conceded, it should be possible to isolate the terrorists from their community.

There are indeed a wide range of issues on which passions run high among most of the members of the two communities. A dialogue is not easy on subjects like nation before panth, religion and politics, role of the centre and para-military forces in Punjab, deployment of the army, security belt around the border, Anandpur resolution, Delhi riots and above all Operation Blue Star. But why are Punjabi Hindus less interested in issues directly related to their security and self-interest than in wider national issues? Would not a dialogue on the former provide a basic for widening its scope?

Wider issues, in fact, require a reinvigoration of the concept of nationalism and the role of sub-national identities. The present mood of most Punjabi Hindus, whatever be its explanation, is less than sympathetic to the urge for a Sikh and a Punjabi identity and to the very concept of linguistic states, if not federalism. They are also not very active in keeping alive avenues of protest, particularly for those, who, in their view, are wrong. Much of this attitude would need revision.

In any case, even if no agreement is reached, any effort towards revival of dialogue would be contribution of reducing the agony of the people of Punjab.

However, the miseries of the people should not remain unattended to till the political atmosphere of the state improves. To mitigate them, the government should be persuaded to insure every citizen in the terrorism stricken area for minimum sum of, say, Rs. one lakh for which the state should pay the premium. The scheme may be supplemented by non-official effort for raising funds to compensate the families of the victims of the terrorists. The feasibility of extending the scheme to riot-prone areas, with necessary changes, may also be considered.

The case for the approach outlined above does not entirely rest on the likely response of the Sikh leaders of the State and the Central Government. It implies a more realistic appreciation of the basic problem and re-orientation in the attitude of the Punjabi Hindus more in favour of their enlightened self-interest—where they share some common ground with the Sikhs—and less in favour of an abstract and contentious concept of national interest.

SEDITION CHARGE AND ANTI-TERRORIST ACT

Sir,

If the Government is really keen to use the Anti-Terrorist Act then it should begin with by making the Mishra Commission report public and giving all those responsible for the Delhi riots and the terrorists responsible for the deaths in Punjab death sentence.

The Cong(I) removed Farooq Abdullah and supported G.M. Shah. During G.M. Shah's regime the anti-national activities kept on increasing the Cong(I) kept on supporting him for long. Should not the Cong(I) be tried for sedition charges?

Also now the Barnala Government must be dismissed and president's rule brought into Punjab. Also, it is wrong on your part to publish articles like 'Most Sikhs Abroad For Khalistan'. Such articles should have no place in your journal.

—Rajeev Sethi

'TWO CATEGORIES OF KHALISTANIS'

Sir,

It is well known that some Sikh religious fanatics, supported by foreign forces, are indulging in communal and ties and demanding Khalistan. Both these categories of Khalistanis and masses should oppose both of them.

However, there is also a second category of 'Khalistanis'. These are the Hindus who in various parts of the country are insulting, harassing and harming Sikhs. Thereby they are forcing Sikhs to think of migrating to Punjab. This is exactly what the Khalistanis of first category want. Thus the aims of both are the same so both should be called Khalistanis. Equally strict action should be taken against both these categories of Khalistanis and masses should oppose both of them.

—Bharat Dogra

PRAISE FOR THE GAZETTE

Sir,

I am getting a complementary copy of the **The Forum Gazette**. If you are sending it, I am grateful to you for it. I feel much better after reading the stories and articles it carries. It appears to me that it is working for the principles I also hold very dear. Fight for human values is today the need of the hour as these values alone can help root out the evils like communal and religious fanaticism and forces of separatism which in my view get encouragement from our Constitution. I wish the fortnightly a thundering success.

—B.M. Sinha
Editor — Weekend Review
Hindustan Times House
New Delhi-110001

A Voice From The Heart Of India

For more than a year I had endeavoured to make myself aware of the problem of Punjab, and tried a solution that involved the healing of the human spirit. There might not have been spectacular gains, yet I venture to address this to you on the strength of a humble and intense personal commitment. I write this also with the conviction that you share my anxiety and would be responsive to my commitment.

In the recent months Punjab has oscillated between hope and despair. The accords arrived at no doubt are achievements of the politician and the administrator; behind this achievement lies a realm of injury which is yet to be ministered unto. Unfortunately neither the politician nor the administrator is capable of such ministration. This is not to denigrate the politician and the administrator, but only to underscore the constraints they function under. Should one good man from among their midst defy these constraints, he should not only fail but also expose himself to ridicule. Hence the healing has to come from elsewhere.

On the 10th of February 1985, I set out on a padyatra to Punjab aimed at 'seeking and giving forgiveness', because I realised that the people were larger than politics or statecraft. If the state attempts to hide the hurt of the people, that hurt, in unexpressed suffering, would turn into neurosis: practical psychology tells us this much.

Psychology also tells us that the human mind invents alternative environments to relieve itself of stress. This is true of the collective mind as well. People of Punjab needed, and were prepared to articulate a transition from despair to relief. To some extent the Punjab accord and the general elections that followed it suited this psychological necessity.

It is in the interest of those who thrive on despair to perpetuate despair. This is the rationale of terrorism. With each strike, the terrorists hope, the number of embittered people would increase. The reactive violence of the State, the terrorists calculate, would further widen the bitterness. This is what is happening in Punjab.

If we forget for a moment the calculations of both the terrorists and the state apparatus, we get a glimpse of the collective mind and what it undergoes. When killings become a changeless scenario, the collective mind retreats into insensitivity and non-reaction. Then on, the tragedy becomes a chess game

between the terrorists and the managers of the state. It ceases to involve the people over whole destiny the battle is being fought.

This is tragedy by default. We have the example of Beirut.

The Sikhs have lost much in terms of material possessions, suffered bodily injury, but more than these is the violation and the humiliation they have suffered as a people. This letter comes to you from a person who is intensely alive to this violation and humiliation. But this violation and humiliation will be totally eclipsed by the cult of terrorism and the ruthlessness of the state, an eclipse which will debilitate the people for generations to come.

On the one side we have the humiliated people of Punjab and on the other the ruling classes despondent over their mistakes. These are two sides of the same tragedy, and need be to redeemed in one stroke.

We have seen the futility of terrorism as well as of the administrative response. It was thus that I conceived of my journey into Punjab as a prayer and penance and an imploration for peace. Can we further concretise this prayer and penance? It needs a specific field of action and visual symbol.

In my journey to Punjab I discovered such a symbol in the town of Panipat, in Haryana. The Gurudwara in Panipat had been damaged during the riots which preceded Mrs. Gandhi's assassination. I stayed back in the town and raised small sums of money by way of alms, a part of which I deposited with the Gurudwara for its reconstruction. The Sikh community of the town did not need a share of the alms I received to reconstruct its Gurudwara, but my contribution was received as a token of seeking forgiveness and giving forgiveness.

It is this Yagna which I would like to extend to the national scene. I need not remind you that no spectacular results can be expected; but such has been the fate of all movements aimed at pacification and healing. To date, the discussion of Punjab invariably centres around the violence of the terrorists and the counter-violence of the state. We shall attempt to free the mind of this fixation, and in the form of this penance provide the popular imagination with a new and liberating fulcrum.

If this much is achieved, much would have been achieved. I seek to interest you in this quest.

—Sadhu Mohan

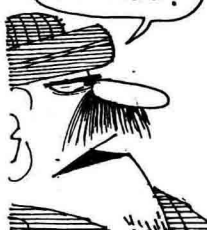
By Rap

NEWSHOUND

HOW COME 90 PERCENT PEOPLE SHOT IN ENCOUNTERS IN THIS STATE ARE TRIBALS AND BACKWARDS?



ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?



WE ARE FOLLOWING OUR OWN SYSTEM OF RESERVATION



THOSE OLD JOKES ... ONCE AGAIN!

Once Josh Malihabadi the famous urdu poet, while commenting on the rustic character of the Punjabi language said to Kanwar Mohinder Singh Bedi, "Kanwar Sahib this 'boli' (language) of yours is so uncouth. I am sure the official language of hell is none other than your Punjabi!"

Kanwar Sahib's immediate response was, "Josh Sahib, in that case, you must make it a point to learn it as early as possible!"

A painter happened to have a Sardarji assistant who was an enthusiastic worker and always finished his work ahead of time.

Once they were painting a room together. The painter was standing on top of the ladder and working on the roof. His assistant who seemed to be in a hurry to finish the job in hand came rushing to him and said, "Ustadji, hold the brush firmly, I am going to take the ladder away for a minute!"



Once a Hindu gentleman, who considered himself a scholar was trying to convince an illiterate Sardarji about the primacy of Hindi.

"Look Sardarji", he said, "you should not get excited about this Hindu-Punjabi controversy. Actually there is no conflict between the two languages at all."

On hearing this, the Sardarji suddenly brightened up and said, you know Lalaji, that is why I don't like it. Ever since Punjabi has come out of Hindi, the latter is only like the empty shell of a badam (almond) from which the Jiri (nut) has been taken out!"

Once a Sikh farmer's buffalo got sick with indigestion. Worried, the farmer went to his neighbour and asked him, "I say what did you do when your buffalo was unwell?"

"Oh, I just gave it some turpentine oil" he replied coolly. The farmer rushed back to his house and forced half a gallon of turpentine oil down the sick buffalo's throat. The poor beast quietly collapsed and passed

away.

Terribly perturbed, the farmer rushed back to the same neighbour and questioned him, saying, "I say, tell me once again, what did you give your buffalo when it was sick like mine?"

"Turpentine oil," came the prompt reply.

"I did the same thing and mine is dead!"

"So was mine" informed his neighbour.



A bus belonging to the Punjab Roadways was packed with passengers as the conductor jumped in and asked them to by their tickets. Approaching a passenger he enquired, "What is your destination?"

"Chamkaur," he replied.

Suddenly a Nihang Singh, who was sitting nearby pounced on the man and slapped him saying, "Don't say Chamkaur. Say Chamkaur Sahib!" (Chamkaur is a sacred place for the Sikhs where Guru Gobind Singh's two sons attained martyrdom).

Going to the next passenger the conductor said, "Where are you going?" Rajpura Sahib, "he said. Then Nihang again got up and slapped the man saying, "It is not Rajpura Sahib. It is Rajpura!"

No one in the bus had the courage to protest against the strange behaviour of the Nihang Singh. So the conductor moved on to the next passenger asking him, "And you sir, where are you going?"

The man looked meekly in the direction of the Nihang Singh and bleated like a lamb saying, "Please ask Nihang Singh Sahib!"



Guru Gobind Singh and the Evolution of the Khalsa

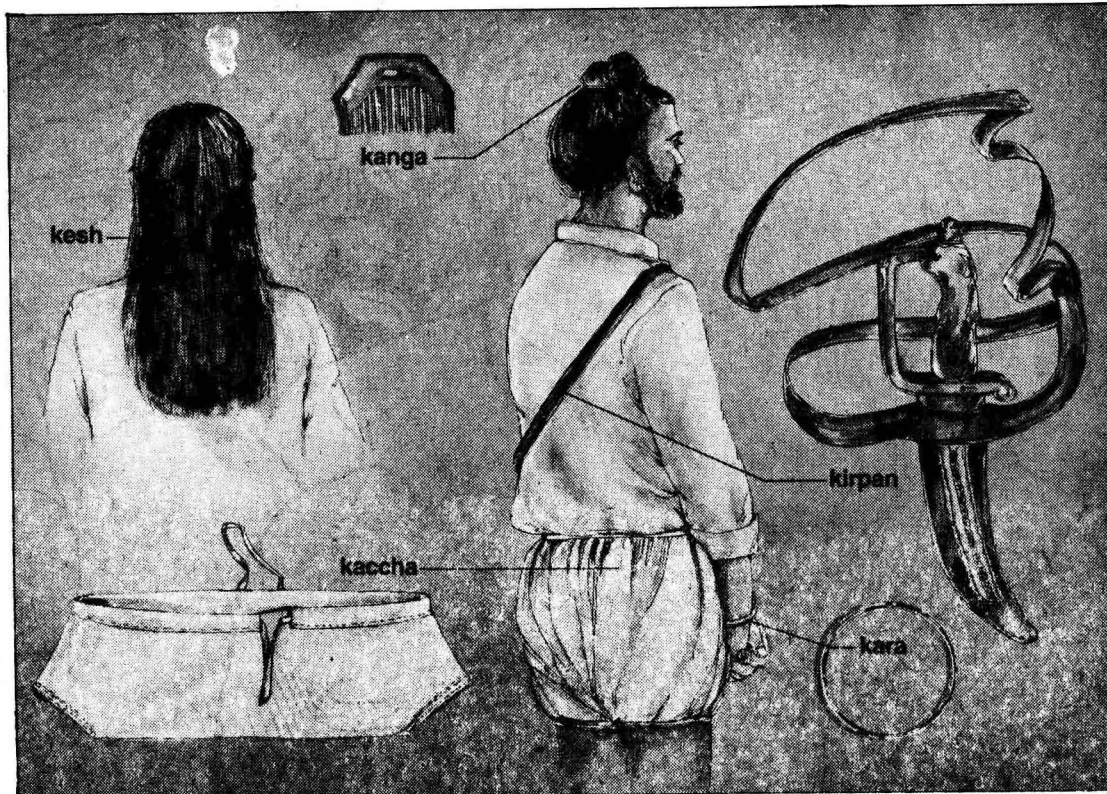
Indubhushan Banerjee

"It is undeniable that Guru Gobind Singh must be counted among the greatest of Indians of all ages. The object he attempted was great and laudable. It was the emancipation of his tribe from oppression and persecution; and the means which he adopted, were such as a comprehensive mind alone could have suggested". To an atmosphere of gloom and utter degradation he brought a message of hope and deliverance and a will to do or die. He not only brought into being a moral force of an intensely dynamic character but was careful to harness to it as much of material assistance as he possibly could. He was a saint as well as a soldier and his ideal was a brotherhood of soldier-saints. As he himself said, he bore no enmity to any one but he was the eternal enemy of tyranny and oppression whatever might be their brand or form. He had declared on them a never-ending war and created the Khalsa to carry it on.

His political principles followed from this fundamental ideal. He had no quarrel with the Mughal Government as such and we have seen in the *Bachitra Natak* he even recognises the temporal sovereignty of the Successors of Babar. But there are certain limits which a Government worth its name must not transgress; it must be just, it must be impartial and it must, in no way, oppress its subjects. Such transgressions the Guru was not prepared to tolerate and his quarrel with them was permanent. If this is understood alright and it is remembered that the Guru's principle was to take arms only in the last resort, his relations with the Emperor during the last two years of his life will cease to puzzle us.

The Mughal Government had become rotten to the core and it was becoming futile any longer to except any justice from its officials. One trouble led to another and the Sikhs soon found themselves in the midst of a never-ending quarrel with the Muhammadans. This struggle inevitably coloured the views of later writers and principles and policies were attributed to the Guru which find no support in his life and writings.

It will not do for us to forget that, whatever else he might have been, Guru Gobind Singh was first and foremost a great religious leader. None but a person of a saintly disposition, highly spiritual and with a complete resignation to the will of God, could have behaved as he did during the most acute crisis of his life. Leaving his home and everything in the hands of the enemy he bids farewell to Anandpur, and with his ranks depleted and his family dispersed, his wives going in one direction and his mother with his two younger sons he



The five symbols : Guru Gobind Singh's legacy to the Sikhs.

knew not where, he arrives at Chamkur and is at once surrounded by the Mughals and the Hill Chiefs. After a superhuman fight against the heaviest of odds, in which he sees his two dearest sons and his chosen companions fall one after another before his very eyes, he stealthily leaves the place and for some time is hunted like a wild animal, now escaping in one disguise and now in another, when news arrives of the barbarous and brutal murder of his two younger sons and the no less tragic death of his mother. He faces all this with the most supreme composure and serenely goes on with his work as if nothing has happened. He compiles a new recension of the *Granth Sahib*, adds his own compositions and busies himself in laying strong the foundations of Sikhism in the Malwa tract. Certainly, no mere politician or soldier could have done this.

It is significant that after a very close contact with the Guru for more than a year Bahadur Shah treated him as a *darvesh* and ordered the considerable movable property left by him to be relinquished to the heirs, though according to rule, it ought to have been confiscated. It is thus clear that the predominant trait in the Guru's character was that he was a man of God and it is unthinkable that such a man, a man who has preached that:

The temple and the mosque are the same; the Hindu worship and the Musalman prayer are the same; all men are the same, it is through error they appear different . . . Musalmans and Hindus adopt the customary dress of their different countries. All men have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body, the

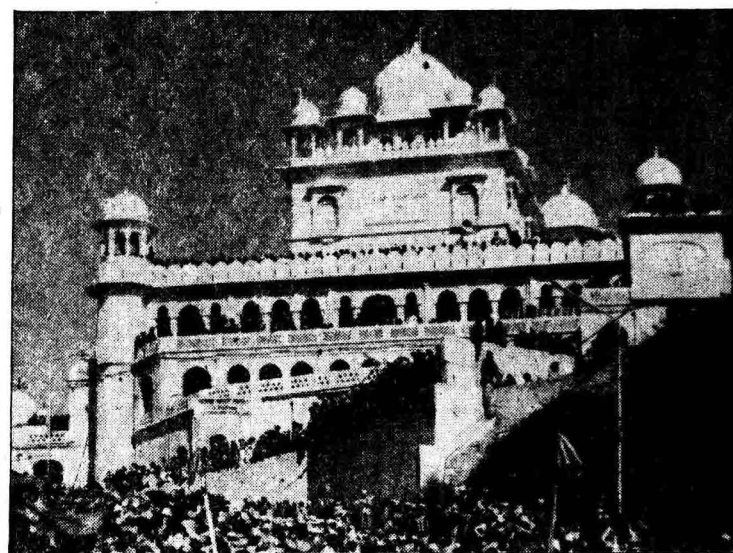
same build, a compound of earth, air, fire and water

could have been the sworn enemy of a community or class . . .

Many-sided Attainments

The Guru was thus, first and foremost, a man of religion but he was also a man of many-sided attainments of which it is difficult to find a parallel. He was a poet of no mean order, and though tradition affirms that a substantial portion of his works were lost in the Sarsa at the time of his retreat from Anandpur to Chamkaur, what survived is enough to establish his claims as a litterateur. It has been said that some of his works 'deserve the very highest place in the ranks of Hindi poetry of the narrative and epic kind' but more striking is the fact how thoroughly the Guru had realized what a vital part literature could be made to play in rousing the dormant energies of a vanquished and degraded people. The stories from the old Sanskrit literature that he popularised in Hindi served as an effective handmaid to his constructive work and at the same time, created a demand for literacy and education among his followers.

That Guru Gobind Singh was a great soldier and a great general would perhaps be denied by none who is even cursorily acquainted with the story of his military adventures. In the *Bachitra Natak* the Guru is rather modest with regard to his own performances as, as is to be expected, attributes his successes to the will of the Almighty, but from what little he says, it is not difficult to see what an accomplished archer he was and how unperturbed and dauntless he could be even in the midst of raining death. In



Anandpur Sahib : legacy of Guru Gobind Singh

forming the estimate of the military abilities of Guru Gobind Singh it must not be forgotten for a moment that there was a tremendous disparity in numbers and resources between himself and his enemies and the amazing thing is not that he lost but that he could fight so long . . .

A New Dynamic Force

He brought a new people into being and released a new dynamic force into the arena of Indian history. What that force accomplished is a matter of history but what is not so well-known are the diverse ways in which it sought to uplift the depressed and the down-trodden. Macauliffe says: "The Guru's teachings had the magical effect of changing a pariah or outcaste through an interminable line of heredity into a brave and staunch Soldier, as the history of the Sikh Mazhabi regiments conclusively proves. This metamorphosis has been accomplished in defiance of the hide-bound prejudices and conservatism of the old Hindu religious systems. Prior to the time of the

Sikh Gurus no general ever conceived the idea of raising an army from men who were believed to be unclean and polluted from birth; but the watchword and war-cry of the Sikhs "Wahguru ji ka khalsa, Wahguru ji ka Fateh" and the stimulating precepts of the tenth Guru, altered what had hitherto been deemed the dregs of humanity into warriors whose prowess and loyalty never failed their leaders."

Nothing further is required to prove the tremendous driving power of normal force that the Guru had created. The strength of these ideals the Guru's was sorely tested, as few ideals have ever been, is the terrible ordeal of the Sikh war of independence and it is a matter of history that they carried the Sikhs through . . . the act remains that Guru Gobind Singh's handiwork, viz., the Khalsa, carved its way to renown and glory and played a noble part in the arena of Indian history. To our mind the Khalsa's greatest contribution to the cause of India was the wresting of the Punjab

and the adjoining lands up to the frontier from the clutches of the Afghans. It is not improbable that if they had not done so, some of these tracts might have been lost, even geographically, to India, as some other tracts had been in the past. The Guru's followers kept the frontier intact and no service could have been greater. Their political creations have long since gone the way of things human and they have passed through many ebbs and tides, but even now, when they constitute roughly only one per cent of the people of India, they hold a position and they wield an influence entirely out of proportion to their numbers.

All this they owe primarily to spirit of rectitude and self-sacrifice, of discipline and God-mindedness, that their Gurus had instilled into them and their salvation in the future lies, as it lay in the past, in an unflinching adherence to the ideals of their founder.

Excerpted from: Evolution of The Khalsa By Indubhushan Banerjee; A. Mukherjee and Co. Ltd., Calcutta, 1972.

Photo : Kamla Bhasin



THE GIFT

By Satindra Singh

TARLOK'S eye caught the headline in the London Times: "General Sarfraz in London." Beneath the headline it read: "General Sarfraz Khan and his family will be in London for three weeks."

He read the news item many times. He was like a dog which had found the bone it had hidden away earlier. But with the expectation came the misgiving. How should he greet Suraiya? Suraiya his first love! The Suraiya who had wanted to be his wife and was the mother of his child!

Tarlok had first met Suraiya in the July of 1943 when he was reading for his Master's degree and she for the Bachelor's. She had difficulty with political science and wanted someone to help her. She had consulted Professor Chandra and he had sent for Tarlok and asked him

to coach her. What more could anyone have asked for? A pretty girl as a pupil and Rs. 50 per mensem for tilling the virgin soil.

Some days later Suraiya had gone to Tarlok's house to leave a message. Her mother was down with typhoid fever and she would be away in Ambala for a few days to look after her.

Suraiya had been alarmed to see the mess in Tarlok's room: Things lying higgledy piggledy and days of dust on everything; almost as if a child having tired of its toys had thrown them away to let and the dust of ages settle on them. She could not help asking, "Don't you have a broom?"

"What do you want with a broom?" asked Tarlok as he realised what she was driving at. "The servant's on leave. And the sweeper woman hasn't been

around for some days. She'll tidy up things when she comes back. No need to worry!" he said with a dry laugh.

"Tomorrow never comes! I'll clean up in a jiffy. Where's the broom?" she demanded as she went into the courtyard. Without giving a thought Tarlok grabbed her by the arms. Suraiya snuggled closer to him and said in a low voice: "Let me go, someone may be watching." She made no effort to free her arms. It was Tarlok who let go of her as if she were a live wire. He gazed at her with some apprehension. A faint smile came on her lips. The blood rushed in Tarlok's face; his ears began to burn. She covered her face with her hands and turned her back on him. Tarlok screwed up courage to say, "don't be cross-patch! Let's us have a look at that face of yours!" Suraiya

didn't move. Tarlok pleaded, "Forgive my presumptuousness. I really didn't think before I grabbed your arm."

Suraiya uncovered her face, turned round and exclaimed, "You are terrible! You grab people's arms without knowing what it means! That's not a nice thing to do."

It took Tarlok some time to understand what she had meant. But he had never spoken to any women other than his mother, sister and his brother's wife. How could he be expected to guess the answer to Suraiya's riddle in so short a time? However, he took her arm again and whispered in her ears, "I promise not to make the same mistake again."

Suraiya looked him full in the face. Tarlok saw the sparkle of desire in her eyes and for the first time felt the surge of man-

hood in his frame. He took her in his arms and crushed her against his body. After a while Suraiya murmured, "Please let me go! I have to take the evening train to Ambala. Mama is very ill. I got a cable from auntie asking me to come over at once. That's all I came to tell you."

From that day onwards Tarlok and Suraiya were seen together. His friends began to call them sunshine and shadow because they met at sunrise and parted only after the setting of sun. So passed two years.

One day Suraiya asked Tarlok, "Come with me to the army hospital and meet Sarfraz. He was badly wounded on the Burma front. He is better now and they've transferred him to the military hospital at Lahore so that his people can be with him."

Continued on page 13, col. 1

"The same Sarfraz?"

"The Same one! My mother's sister's son. The one my Mama wants me to marry."

"Why don't you? He has a good job." "What's the matter with you today? You baffle out all the rubbish that comes in your silly head!"

"Nothing to get so worked up about! replied Tarlok. 'Wasn't it you who told me that this Sarfraz would lay down his life for you? And he is a full major! If you marry a chap who has a good job and also loves you, your mother's wishes would be fulfilled. Kill two birds with one stone, so they say.'"

"For God's sake shut up! You just come along with me so that we can do our duty by that sick baboon."

"What a waste of higher education! How can you call your husband to be a baboon?"

"I won't waste my breath bantering words with you; Come with me and see for yourself. He looks exactly like one sired



by a male monkey. And that aunt of mine is so hot tempered! In the coldest of winter she can make room so hot as to turn milk sour. That's the truth, so help me god! The whole of Ambala will vouch for it."

"I am no Don Juan! My face is squashed, my nose flat, my eyes beady." "Okay! you're no Casanova. But you've got a little grey matter. I'd rather have brains than beauty," she said putting her arms around him.

That afternoon Suraiya and Tarlok went to the army hospital to see Sarfraz. Sarfraz was an ugly brute; he looked like a king of some simian tribe. The doctor had taken off the bandages from his face but his body from his waist downwards was still encased in plaster. He was very happy to see them. "Forgive me Suraiya," he cried. "I can't get up to welcome you."

Suraiya introduced Tarlok to Sarfraz. Sarfraz did not express the slightest surprise. On the contrary he talked to Tarlok as if he had just met a long lost friend of the days of his childhood.

Suraiya and Tarlok visited Sarfraz many times. They always took a book or a bouquet of flowers with them. As they entered Sarfraz would ask them, "And what have you got me today?" He would thank her and hold the gift against his heart.

Sarfraz never questioned Suraiya or Tarlok about their friendship. He talked of other things

or just laughed. Seeing him so cheerful reminded Tarlok of his late grandfather's words: "Son! fat, ugly people can always laugh at themselves and also give others something to laugh at."

After nine or ten months Sarfraz was discharged from hospital. Before leaving for his posting in Bangalore, he invited Suraiya and Tarlok to dine with him at Stiff's—the most expensive restaurant in town.

While Sarfraz was away Suraiya and Tarlok got more and more involved with each other. Suraiya spent many nights with Tarlok.

After the ordeal of the final examination, Suraiya had to face a bigger ordeal: she missed her period.

Tarlok tried to assuage her fears: "Nothing to worry!" he assured her, "it often happens this way. All will be well next month."

But Tarlok was worried. He consulted his friends. They could not help him. In desperation he turned to auntie Mano and the old woman Mango both of whom he disliked. They recommended raisins in hot milk and skipping. Nothing happened. When Suraiya missed her next period, Tarlok was at his wit's end. He did not have the nerve to consult a lady doctor. He was terrified of people getting to know about it. Whatever anyone suggested he tried on Suraiya: ergot, steelgrey pills. No periods. And so passed the third month. Now there was only one thing left to do: marry her. They had often talked of it but this was the first time they discussed it without reserve.

A drowning man will clutch at any straw. In sheer desperation, Tarlok send off a telegram to his parents saying that he was married at a civil registrar's office and would be arriving at Sialkot with his wife. He hoped that in this way his parents might accept the marriage as an accomplished fact and reconcile themselves to it.

They arrived at Sialkot to find the house in mourning. Not one word of welcome from anyone. No one as much as spoke civilly to them. They were made to feel thoroughly unwanted.

The sages have rightly said that love, odour and cough can never be kept secret. The same is true of falsehood. Within a few days Tarlok's people came to know that Suraiya was Muslim. Tarlok's mother tried to kill herself. She swore that the girl's touch had polluted her and she did not wish to live any longer. She went on repeating this till

Tarlok could stand it no longer. Tarlok put Suraiya on the train to Ambala and went back to Lahore. He realised that his mother did not want to see his face—and he had been her favourite third son.

Tarlok had assured Suraiya, "Don't worry! I'll look for a job at Lahore and as soon as I find one, I'll send you a telegram to come over. We will honour our commitments. Look after yourself. Don't do anything rash—or my life be forfeit."

God had His own inscrutable design. Tarlok not only found no job, he lost his home as well. In August 1947, he was compelled as were millions of other Hindus and Sikhs to quit Pakistan and seek refuge in India. Suraiya likewise had to flee India and with other Muslims found refuge in Pakistan.

Early in December 1947 Tarlok got a note from Suraiya saying that she had married Sarfraz and was the mother of a boy. Sarfraz doted on the child. Tarlok was saddened and bewildered by the letter. He was sad that his first love and the mother of his child should belong to someone else, but it was not her fault; she was the victim of the wretched society in which she lived. He could not understand how Sarfraz had agreed to marry Suraiya. She had rejected him many times and carried another man's child in her womb. Tarlok felt that they must have decided to make the best of the situation. The baboon faced Sarfraz could never have found a wife as pretty as Suraiya. And as an unwed mother, Suraiya could not have found anyone better than Sarfraz.

Tarlok rang up the Pakistan High Commission and was told that General Sarfraz was staying at the Savoy Hotel. Tarlok rang-up the Savoy and asked to be put through to his room. A male voice answered. Tarlok put down the receiver. After trying many times, he eventually got a female voice on the line. "Can I speak to Mrs. Sarfraz?" he asked. "This is Mrs. Sarfraz. Who is calling?"

"My name is Tarlok."

"What are you doing here?" The voice was full of love. "Visiting London. Suraiya where and when can we meet?"

"Come for lunch. You can meet Sarfraz. And Shujahat. You have never seen Shujahat."

"He must be a big boy!" "He will soon be thirteen. He's exactly like you: self-willed and full of himself. But Allah be thanked! He's also got your brains. Do we see you at lunch?"



"No, no lunch for me. If you feel like it, meet me at 4 p.m. at the Elysium opposite Marble Arch underground station. We can have tea together."

"You haven't changed one bit. Alright! It will be the Elysium at 4 p.m. Try to be punctual. Don't make me wait as you used to do. Bye!"

Tarlok wondered how Suraiya would greet him. What did she look like after all these years? Would she be tall and slender as she was or would she have put on weight? Did Shujahat take after her or him? He was lost in his thoughts when he heard Suraiya's voice: "What is on your mind? You ask me for tea and dream of other people!"

"Not at all! It was of you I was day-dreaming," answered Tarlok rising from his chair. "Liar!" laughed Suraiya. She pushed Shujahat in front, "Say hello to uncle Tarlok Singh! You've heard Daddy talk of him."

"Salaamalaikum, Uncle Tarlok." "Walaikum Salaam, my son," replied Tarlok patting the boy on the head. A smile hovered on Suraiya's lips; her eyes twinkled with mischief.

Tarlok was relieved to see that the boy's face was his mother's; only his hands and feet were as ungainly as his.

"Son, what will you have?" "I don't want anything." "Why not?" "I don't like tea or coffee." "Have something else?" "Hot Dog." "What about me?" asked Suraiya. "You think of the interest and forget the investment." "Sorry! What'll you have?" "You have a short memory! Pineapple cake and tea." While they waited they talked of many trivial things. The waiter brought them tea. Suraiya poured out two cups. While they were sipping, Sarfraz suddenly turned up. "Hello Tarlok!" he said most affably.

The cup fell from Tarlok's hand. People in the restaurant turned back to look. Tarlok wished he could sink in to the ground and vanish.

Sarfraz was in his general's uniform. He smiled and said, "Sikhs are said to be brave people, but you've turned yellow at the sight of a soldier."

"I was taken aback," replied Tarlok with a dry laugh.

Tarlok ordered a cup of tea for Sarfraz. He was completely non-plussed with his amiability. And more so as every time Shujahat called him "uncle", Suraiya pressed his foot under the table and smiled.

Sarfraz sipped his tea with apparent unconcern. He twisted

his handle bar moustache and launched on reminiscences of their Lahore days. After a while, Suraiya interrupted him. "Enough of all this foolish anecdote. Remember, we have to dine at the High Commission at 7 p.m."

"Sorry darling! I might have gone on talking till doomsday. We've met after a very long time." Then he turned to Tarlok, "Brother, we must take leave of you. But will be with you tomorrow morning. We'll see the sights of London together."

Thereafter Tarlok was always with the Sarfraz family. One day it was the British Museum, Westminster and Hyde Park; the other it would be Cambridge, Oxford or Brimingham. He dropped all his other friends. They teased about his new pre-occupation but he would not change his plans. He wanted to spend all his time with the Sarfrazs because he did not know when, if ever, he would get to meet them again. His Indian friends he could meet in India. But he would not be able to go to Pakistan to meet Suraiya. Nor could she come to India to meet him.

The day Tarlok was to leave for Delhi, he rang up his Indian friends and said goodbye to them over the phone. The Sarfraz arrived in his room just after breakfast. He was in a fidget.

"What is the great hurry?" Sarfraz asked him, "Your flight is at 12.30." "I have to be at the



airways terminal at 10.45 to catch the airport bus." "Why the terminal? We will see you at Heathrow."

"Don't put yourself out! It is not necessary."

"Put ourselves out?" laughed Suraiya. "It's another three hours to 12 O'clock but Sardar Sahib you are already out of your wits. You talk to Sarfraz while I do your packing. Don't know when we'll see you again."

Tarlok ordered a beer for Sarfraz and himself; a chocolate-milk for Suraiya and Shujahat. So passed a pleasant hour. Then they drove him to the airport.

Tarlok checked in his baggage and rejoined the Sarfrazs. When the flight was called, Tarlok kissed Shujahat on the forehead and said "Bye! bye! So Suraiya. He took Sarfraz in his arms. "How can I ever thank you...?" he began.

"Thank me for what? It is I who should be thanking you. If you had not given us as lovely a gift as Shujahat, people would have taunted me that in Sarfraz's garden seeds do not germinate nor his wife bear fruit."



Bharat Dogra Talks To Farmers On The Pakistan Border

During a recent visit to Amritsar district this correspondent met several farmers of border villages who complained that, apart from sharing certain general problems with other farmers in Punjab, they have to put up with some special problems on account of their fields being located near Pakistan border. These problems deserve special attention because the morale of the border area farmers must be kept high and they should not be allowed to feel that the authorities are not bothered

about their problems. The farmers I met were from the border villages of Ajnala tehsil but most probably similar problems are faced in other border villages also.

The farmers complained that excessive restrictions had been imposed on them which prevented easy access to their fields and tubewells with the result that their crops were badly neglected. Such restrictions were imposed even during the day and permission slips were not given properly or in time. These restrictions, com-

bined with erratic supply of electricity, had resulted in considerable damage to their crop. Within limitations of genuine security considerations, the authorities should try to see to it that minimal harm was done to the crops of farmers. To the extent that this is unavoidable, farmers should be compensated in cash for the economic loss being incurred by them for no fault of theirs. This is not being done.

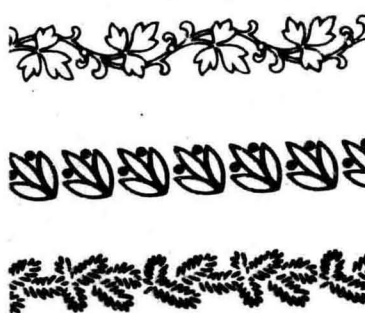
Even compensation of war-time damage, which is agreed to in principle, is unduly delayed.

Kuldeep Singh, a youth from a village located some distance away from the border (Jagdev Kalan) said that some of the compensation for the 1971 war operation was paid in 1979 in his village.

Another problem, about which the people from villages like Vera and Syadpur Kalan were very upset, is that occasionally some of their men who were not involved in any criminal activity, were arbitrarily taken away and detained by the Border Security Force people. Villagers alleged that some officers were themselves in collusion with smugglers and one reason why they tried to impose excessive restrictions or harassed some among them was that they wanted to prevent obstacles to their own unlawful activities.

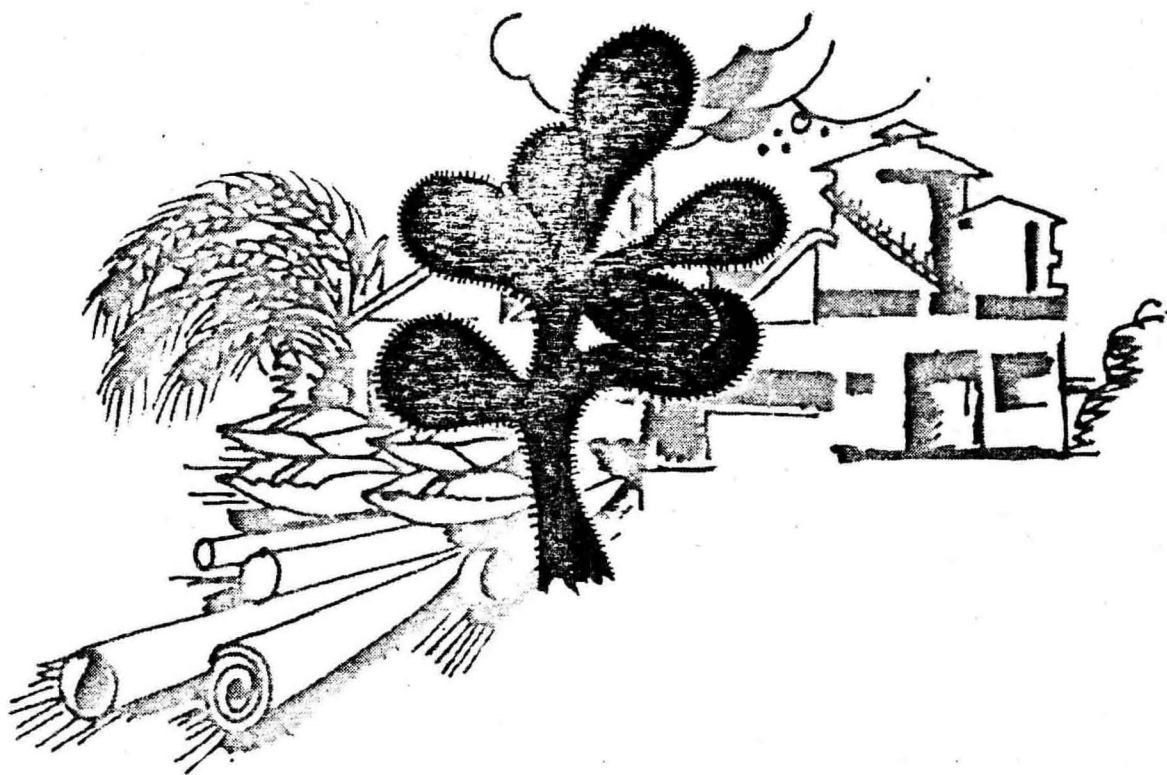
Whatever the reason, it is important that harassment of innocent people should not be allowed to continue. For this reason it is important that security forces should have good links with honest and respectable area and the activities of suspected people instead of harassing innocent people. In addition, of course, corruption within the security forces should be strictly curbed.

The villagers also felt very apprehensive about the proposal discussed for some time to create a 500 metre belt in the border areas. They felt that such a measure would not help security but would certainly ruin them as farmers. All villagers to whom I talked said with one voice that this was a very harmful proposal which should be scrapped forthwith.



ਕੀ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਲੋਕ ਇਹ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹਨ ?

ਕਿ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੀ ਸਰਬ-ਪੱਖੀ ਉਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਹੱਕੀ ਮੰਗਾਂ ਮਨਵਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਯਤਨ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਬਜਾਏ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਅਤਿਵਾਦੀਆਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਵਿਹੜੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਖਿਲੇਰੇ ਕੰਡੇ ਚੁਗਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੀ ਰੁੱਝੀ ਰਹੇ ?



ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਤਾਂ

ਅਤਿਵਾਦੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਹਮਾਇਤੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਡੱਟ ਕੇ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਗਏ ਕਦਮਾਂ ਦੀ ਖੁਲ੍ਹਕੇ ਹਮਾਇਤ ਕਰੋ।

ਲੋਕ
ਸੰਗਠਨ
ਪੰਜਾਬ

Karnataka Decentralises Politics . . .

Continued from page 1, col. 2

lagers, through the Zilla Parishads, will be the decision makers. Decision making under the Panchayat Act will thus be at the grassroots level.

The Three Tier System

The base of the structure is the Gram Sabha, of which every villager who is eligible to vote for the Zilla Parishad is a member. The Mandal Panchayat consists of a cluster of villages with a population up to 11,000 with the exception of districts with sparse population where the number is 5000. One member for every 500 population (or part thereof) will be elected on the Mandal Panchayat, with 25 per cent of seats reserved for women. The Mandal Panchayat elects its Pradhan and Upapradhan. These bodies will be responsible virtually for everything, for the construction and maintenance of public wells, ponds, tanks, water supply, sanitation, elementary health care and other such activities. A major responsibility will be allocation for house sites for villages. Funds will come from the government, from the Zilla Parishad and from levies imposed by the Mandal Panchayats themselves.

The Gram Sabha will meet at least twice a year to discuss the implementation of development programmes in the village, or proposals for any new programmes. It will also discuss integration of all sections of the village, education programmes and the raising of a Land Army. The body will be expected to assist the Mandal Panchayat in implementing development schemes in all ways.

Zilla Parishads are the Core

For the Zilla Parishad, the apex body of district government, membership consists of one member for every 35,000 or so of population. Again, 25 per cent of seats are reserved for women. Members elect their Adhyakshi and Upadhyakshi, the former having the status of a Minister of State in the State Government, the latter that of a Deputy Minister, together with the salaries and allowances enjoyed by these ministers. The Zilla Parishad members and officers are elected for five years.

Zilla Parishads will meet once a month. The Chief Executive of the body will be a "Chief Secretary" an IAS Officer of the rank of a Deputy Commissioner or above, who will be the link between the Zilla Parishad, the bureaucracy and its political executives, and also the bureaucratic link between the Zilla Parishad and the State government. He will also work as the chief coordinator of the various departments involved in development. Obviously much will depend on the quality of this official.

The Zilla Parishad will be responsible for the formulation, as well as execution, of development plans. Its functions cover development, agriculture, animal husbandry, Harijan welfare, horticulture, buildings, and communications including maintenance and repair of district

roads, public health, irrigation and ground water resources, all forms of industry, education and electrification.

Because of its revolutionary character, in contrast to previous panchayati raj experiments, the Karnataka Act was opposed by the Congress (I) at every stage. Once the legislature passed it with the required majority, Presidential assent was withheld for more than a year, thanks to the ruling party which has been transformed into a conservative, status quo party. This forced delay allowed Ramakrishna Hegde and others to widen their horizons and look ahead to possible problems in the experiment.

Inherent Dangers

Keen public interest is evident in the large number of candidates in the field for the 908 Zilla Parishad seats. 6,400 nominations were filed! Elections were fought on party lines. The Act bans defection in elected local bodies, and improves on the 52nd Amendment to the Constitution. But the realities of casteism and group politics cannot be wished away. While the Scheduled Castes and Tribes will get their statutory quota of reserved seats—not less than 18 per cent and 25 per cent for women—the Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats will certainly be swamped by the two dominant communities the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas, which control the key posts in the State Janata Party and the Hegde Ministry. The backward classes and minorities, the backbone of the Congress(I), have been left out. Because of their political clout the two dominant communities occupy 90 out of the 139 treasury bench seats, even though they make up only 30 per cent of the electorate. (Hegde was persuaded to dilute the recommendations of the Second Backward Classes Commission and include them in the reservation list.) With Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats taking over all development activities there is a real danger that a measures meant for the weaker sections may never reach them.

But as experienced observers point out, this is already the prevailing situation in the rural areas all over India. Panchayati Raj, Karnataka style, cannot make things worse. At worst the status quo will remain, but there is a strong possibility, that given the new set-up given the increasing awareness of people's rights combined with the electoral process, things can improve!

Nirmal Mukerji, former Cabinet Secretary, Government of India, in an interesting critique of the Karnataka experiment ("The Karnataka Model of District Government", PANCHAYATI RAJ IN KARNATAKA TODAY, Edited by George Mathew: Concept Publishing Company and Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi 1986) highlights other requirements of the experiment. "... strategies of decentralization alone" he points out may

"become a recipe for fragmentation unless they are counter balanced by strategies of coherence. Karnataka's proposed inter-district council at the state-level provides the balance here for Mukarji insists that while local institutions must function freely, this must be within" an overall vision, jointly conceived and continually updated. "He goes on to say that genuine decentralization of power and functions, the heart of the Karnataka Act, must be reflected in a matching contraction of bureaucracy at the State level, and he adds that Karnataka's commitment to devolution will be judged by how much the state level machinery is cut down. (Recently Ramakrishna Hegde reduced the number of Ministers in his Cabinet. Was he looking ahead at "genuine devolution?")

The Federal Content

Mukarji warns that devolution of funds to the panchayati raj institutions will bear careful watch and he welcomes the establishment of a State Finance Commission to decide how much, and how funds will be allocated. "What is going to happen to planning in this decentralization-coherence model of federalism?" Mukarji poses this question. He points out that in the "mini-federation" proposed by Karnataka the relationship between State level and district level planning assumes critical importance. For if the Karnataka experiment succeeds it can set a pattern for the nation. Part of its importance lies in its "federal" character as opposed to the present unitary system.

Everything will depend on the human factors, the elected representatives and the bureaucrats, the latter particularly in the initial stages. Karnataka has already organised an orientation workshop for officers who will occupy strategic posts. Hopefully, with the State government committed to the experiment, the bureaucrats will take their cue.

The Hegde Government has worked for the "fair treatment" principle in Union-State relations: Mukarji cautions that its "credentials" will be on trial when it comes to the way Janata Party ruled Zilla Parishads treat those controlled by other parties, and here much will depend on the ruling Janata at the State level. Party leaders should take the lead in evolving an all-party consensus on the way elections should be conducted and candidates selected. Mukarji says Rama Krishna Hegde has publicly gone on record immediately after the January 2 elections, as recognising that the Congress(I) has given a creditable performance. He has welcomed the existence of a strong opposition in the Zilla Parishads. If his lead is followed by his party, Karnataka may well set an example of "fair treatment".

The Goal-District Government

In the past, according to Mukarji's critique, panchayati raj institutions have been inherently unstable because they have been

concerned only with development. But genuine development, by changing the socio-economic status quo, shakes the power structure, and when this happens, the panchayati raj institutions must have executive authority—in Mukarji's view this is the police in the present Indian context — as an ally, not as an observer or adversary as happens nowadays. This is not the case in the Karnataka structure, and therefore, Mukarji fears, the experiment may not be "a radical change agency." It may well go under attack by the same destabilising agencies which put an end to previous experiments. In order to avoid this, if the Karnataka model ultimately aims at a "better system of governance", it will have to be modified in such a way that it can be pushed forward into a model of district government which goes beyond development, and encompasses law and order management. Mukarji admits that for most people this lies in the "realm of the unthinkable". But must it be so?

That is the challenge implicit in the Karnataka experiment and that is why what happens in that state, how the Zilla Parishads function, how the people respond to the Mandal Panchayats, what headway this innovation in micro-planning makes, is of such importance. This is why all eyes should be on Karnataka.

Academic Exposes Bihar . . .

Continued from page 1, col. 5

Yet this amazing man might well take this up too. A fire-brand of the Bhoodan movement days of Vinoba Bhave, at 53 Wadhwa has still got much of the fire left. An agricultural economist at the Gokhale Institute of Pune his major research in itself is a pioneering work on agrarian legislation in India. A five-volume effort, it will be the first comprehensive collection on the subject since 1793.

"Land reform continues to be a myth, and one that needs to be examined in context of its evolution. My work aims at collectivising all the relevant data." Reflecting on the present day lack of ideology he sums up the situation as being one where "the standard of living has gone up but not the standard of life." His five year crusade has concluded victoriously, "the Supreme Court has upheld my thesis and called it a 'fraud on the constitution.' What more can I want? "The immediate effect of its importance is evident in many States as they are scrambling to reexamine their illegal ordinances.

Wadhwa's one man crusade has proved, more importantly that people are the true keepers of their democratic rights which are lost perhaps more due to apathy rather than repression. Palkhivala's tribute to Wadhwa waxes eloquently his major achievement as being one that reminded the people of India that it is the Constitution of this land which "is meant to hold the country together when the raucous and fractious voices of today are lost in the silence of the centuries."

Marching for Harmony

Continued from page 3, col. 5

ny have come because they feel that these "progressive thinkers" are not related to the common people since they are the intelligentsia. Here the people are illiterate. "They talk about divorcing religion from politics rather than politics from religion," he said. Nazar Barni, a poet who works in the university commented, "Their intention is praiseworthy. But the problem is not going to be solved through peace marches and speeches. The issue involves all religions, so the speakers should have been drawn from all religions. They should have also called the fundamentalist elements so as to prove their point more effectively. Even the publicity was inadequate."

When informed of this feedback, Safdar Hashmi, a member of the Committee clarified that people were attributing the committee's work as a 'communist' movement because the initiative was taken by the Democratic Teachers Front of Delhi University, which is associated with the CPI(M). He however added, "despite this, I don't see any other involvement of the CPI(M) as a party to this entire move."

As to why the CPI(M) took the initiative, another member explained, "the present situation reveals that the classes, especially the working classes are not only divided on socio-economic grounds but have come to be sharply divided on caste, creed and colour. And if this trend continues, what would be the fate of the leftist parties?"

Among the numerous cultural programmes that were held, the Parcham group put Amrita Pritham's verses on the 1947 riots to song. MS Sathya's famous film on the partition, Garam Hawa and Prakash Jha's documentary on the Bihar riots evoked enthusiastic response.

But the item that proved to be an instant hit was the anti-communal play 'Bhaichara Ka Apharan' (The Kidnapping of Brotherhood) staged by the well known street theatre group JANM (Jan Natya Manch). Performed at least 28 times in a matter of five days, it made for immediate rapport with the roadside viewers with its depiction of communal harmony in a most vivid, satirical and heart warming way. The play revolves around the lost feeling of brotherhood between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. "It effectively conveys a feeling of guilt and shame to what we've done to ourselves," commented Hashmi, who wrote the script. The 25 minute play drew large enthusiastic crowds, who seemed to be genuinely moved by the message being put across. The play which received thunderous applause, ends with an epilogue in the words put together by Hashmi:

*Mera janam hua tha bhai,
Kitne hi sadiyon pehle
Koi mujh ko kahe ekta,
koi bhaichara kehle.
Aao Bharat Desh ke Viron,
Aao mujh ko azad karo,
Aao mere bandhan toro,
Aman ko plur abad karo*

"It is easy to be suspicious of the Government . . . but just try it out"

Says Bunker Roy

The debate in the voluntary sector over the proposal to establish a National Council of Rural Voluntary Agencies and State Councils along with a Code of Conduct/Ethics is continuing. In the *Gazette* issue of October 1-15, 1986, we gave the background to the proposals and the proceedings of a 3-day Convention called in New Delhi by those who opposed the proposals. In this issue we bring you excerpts from a *Gazette* interview with Sanjit "Bunker" Roy who is closely associated with the proposals and is a Consultant to the Planning Commission on Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development and the Director of the Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia near Ajmer.

Why was the question of a National Council and Code raised?

When the Chapter on Voluntary Agencies was accepted in the Seventh Plan, it was decided to include it in the rural voluntary sector. So the question arose. "What would be the role of a rural voluntary agency? What would be the criteria for defining such an agency? What would be the kind of programmes? How much money could they possibly commit?"

Why did you restrict this to 'rural' agencies?

My strength is in the rural sector. I cannot speak for the urban. Also, I wanted to give recognition and legitimacy to those small groups working in villages, in very sensitive areas of activity, like relief and rehabilitation of bonded labour, minimum wages for workers, development of scheduled castes and tribes etc. . . . Bureaucrats cannot identify with this area. They think of voluntary agencies doing traditional social welfare programmes. We told them that in the 1970s many agencies have come up which have a totally different role and need recognition. Don't forget that this chapter has aroused a great deal of controversy with the bureaucrats. For the first time we have legitimised the role of voluntary agency and we have also defined the role, and it is quite a radical role.

Would you explain that.

The role of a voluntary agency is (a) to supplement the govern-

ment effort and to offer the poor an alternative choice (b) these agencies are considered the eyes and ears of the people in the villages and their role is to TEST THE SYSTEM; e.g. if there is a minimum wages act, or a law against untouchability, the VA is to see HOW it functions, WHETHER it functions, HOW the government responds. These are very radical roles, approved by the National Development Council. The VA's role is also to (c) demystify technology, (d) disseminate information, (e) mobilise local resources.

There is a lot of criticism on the criteria you have laid down for a rural VA to be recognised as such. What is your requirement?

There are many bureaucrats who would like to use VAs in their work, who want to know how to identify a VA. So we say that (a) such an agency must be based in a rural area; this stands to reason if you are doing rural work. (b) it must have worked for at least three years before getting government funds (c) its office bearers must not be elected members of any political party . . .

People ask why this should be so.

We are only talking about POLITICAL PARTIES, NOT POLITICAL PROCESSES. So we are not referring to panchayat members. If there is a voluntary worker who has worked for years in a certain area and people want him to stand for a panchayat or a cooperative, he should be allowed to do so, but as an independent, not as a political party worker.

We also say that a VA must adopt non-violent and constitutional means for rural development . . .

But your critics say that "non-violent" and "constitutional" can be interpreted in ways convenient for the establishment! If groups working to create social and political awareness oppose the local powers that be, their activities CAN AND ARE described as "violent" and "un-constitutional". We all know that this happens.

These are interpretations. AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHY WE NEED A NATIONAL COUNCIL. Should an occasion arise where

a VA is threatened by just this sort of deliberate misinterpretation, SOMEONE has to establish the fact that this is a genuine VA, that theirs are not "violent" means. THAT someone has to be recognised by State Governments, by Parliament, by the bureaucracy, and by the voluntary agencies themselves.

What about the Code?

When the 20 programmes for which funds would be allocated were identified in the Plan, we realised that there has to be some accountability. So we added the lines at the end which have created such a future. "There is a need for voluntary agencies..." (please note 'voluntary agencies', not 'government') "to decide on a code of conduct to be applicable to those agencies receiving government funds."

The Code is Only for those agencies?

Yes, only those. And it is the VAs themselves who have drawn up the Draft code. This had to be included, otherwise it would have been difficult to get the chapter accepted and 150 crores allocated.

The composition of the suggested Council in your draft makes it appear to be totally government controlled, with the Minister as Chairman, nominating all the members.

I agree, but I said it was a draft. The composition must be discussed in open discussion. People have asked me if I have changed my mind since all these meetings have taken place and I have said "Yes, I have changed my stand on the Draft Bill and it needs to be redrafted. It is too pro-government. It must be pro-Voluntary agencies." But we have done our bit, we have created all this future. Now people have to sit down and redraft it. Right now the Draft Bill is being translated into all the regional languages and small groups are discussing it. The discussion is still within the voluntary sector, nothing to do with the government. We can change the draft, change the Bill. We can make it as pro-Voluntary agencies as possible. BUT LET US DO IT! Lets not always be negative and say "Reject! Reject!"

You have mentioned the Foreign Contributions Bill and the Kudal Commission. What

were the Voluntary agencies doing when these were going on?

That is what I ask too.

What were you doing?

I was shouting, in a lone voice. I have been shouting at the Kudal Commission too for many years. But none of the voluntary agencies did anything. Moves made by the Government in the last five years have been aimed directly at controlling the voluntary sector, to minimise its autonomy and flexibility. How come none of these people raised their voices before? The Code was drafted over the past six or seven months (This interview was in November '86) and has already generated 50 to 60 meetings! Regarding the Foreign Contributions Bill there was a meeting in Delhi. A resolution was passed and sent to the Government. They also passed a resolution about the Kudal Commission. That was all. There was no follow-up. Why not just pass resolutions against the draft Code too? That would be consistent. The fact is that government control MAS come in and you've not noticed it. The voluntary agencies did nothing to start a campaign resisting it because it didn't affect their organisations personally. But it affects all of us. The Kudal Commission is a direct threat to voluntary agencies. There is no justification for it.

To get back to the Draft Bill and Code. How do you arrive at a consensus when so many grassroots organisations are involved?

By small groups getting together and discussing the matter. The debate is still within the voluntary either Government, bureaucracy, politicians are involved. When small groups at a district level come together and send me reports, giving their

view, or asking for more information, I would give it more weight, consider their views more seriously than those of people sitting in Delhi. I would take into consideration who are the people who initiated the debate, are they village based? I would document their reactions, and document and disseminate other models of the Code they might propose, or any suggestions about the Bill. Orissa has come up with a model, West Bengal is doing so. I would disseminate this information. . .

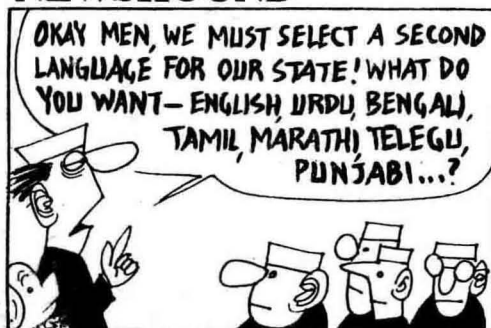
In all languages?

Yes, the debate has only just started. We have so many years to go.

How have you worked with Government funds so far?

The number of small groups supported in this last financial year has been phenomenal. Through PADI (Peoples Action for Development in India). We have panel of experts, we have identified voluntary groups all over the country, we are going to be our eyes and ears. We cannot go to all the groups so we have done the following: in Maharashtra we have identified two or three groups who will report to us which are the agencies we should support. We meet once every 2 to 3 months to discuss which projects we should support. You should ask the VAs who have received Government funds how many have experienced interference. There are very good bureaucrats who are more 'voluntary' than VAs. The Patwari is government, so is the Secretary to the Ministry. The fact that the Patwari doesn't understand you, does not mean the Secretary doesn't. One's experience of Government is so negative, that it is easy to be suspicious. All I says is "Just try it out".

NEWSHOUND



By Rap

The
Forum
Gazette

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FORTNIGHTLY
FOCUSSING
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- Civil Liberties
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- Democratic Values
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